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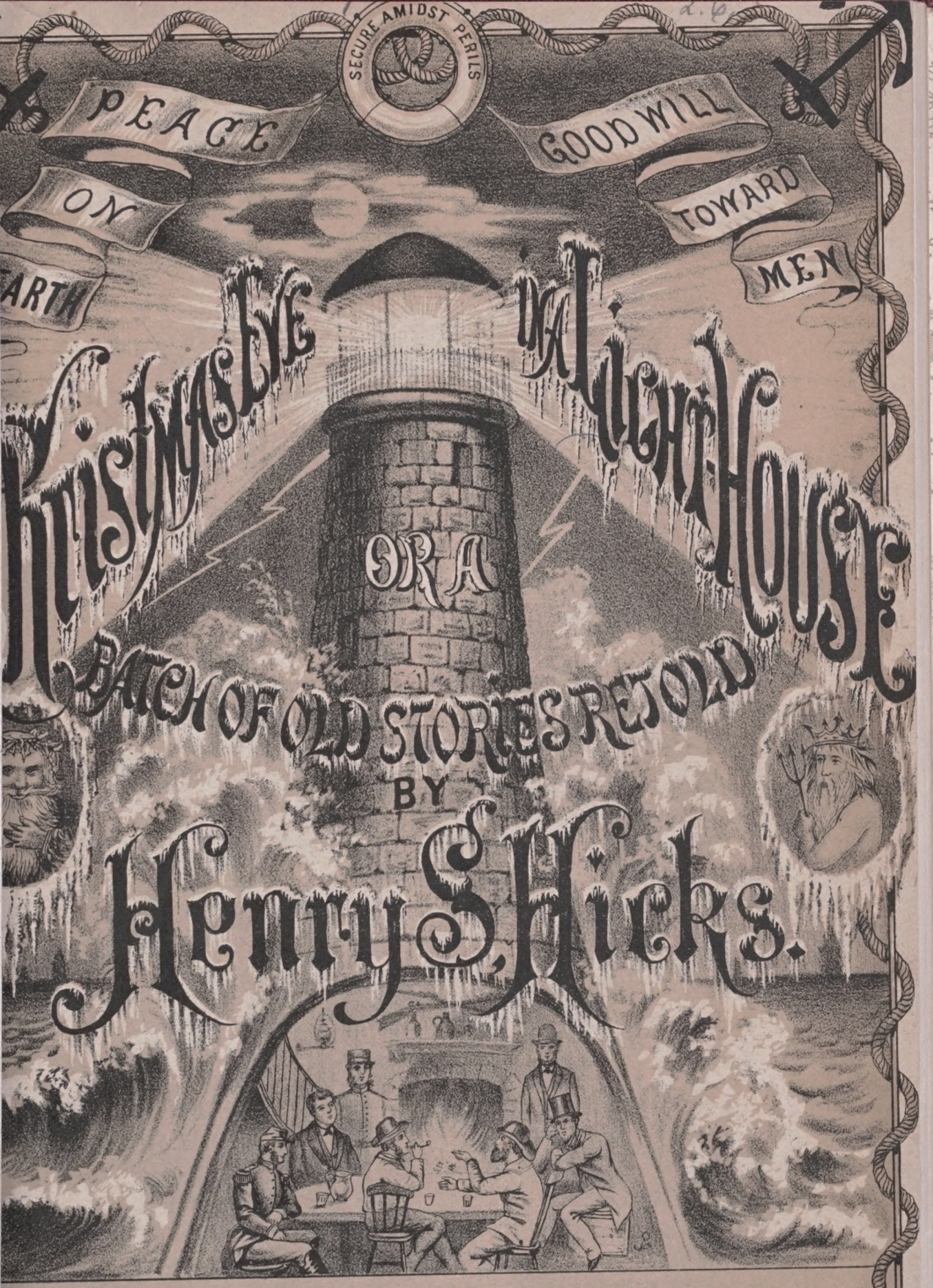

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CHRISTMAS-EVE

IN A

LIGHT-HOUSE;

OR,

A Batch of Old Stories Re-told.

BY HENRY S. HICKS.

Heap on more wood! The wind is chill;
But let it whistle as it will,
We 'll keep our merry Christmas still.
* * * * * * * * *

'T was Christmas broached the mightiest ale;
'T was Christmas told the merriest tale;
A Christmas gambol oft could cheer
The poor man's heart through half the year.
—*Sir Walter Scott.*

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BY

HENRY S. HICKS AND JOHN POLHEMUS.

PREFACE.

Dear Reader:

In tendering for your perusal the following series of Christmas Stories, it is with the sincere desire that they may serve to add, if possible, to your enjoyment of the Advent Festival. Whilst the general scope and treatment of the narrative is entirely of my own construction, yet, as the title implies, I have not hesitated to appropriate the main incidents embodied in one or two of the tales from other sources, with the desire to work out an harmonious whole. Sincerely wishing you all the Compliments of the Season,

I would subscribe myself

Yours, very faithfully,

H. S. H.

December, 1877.

DEDICATED

TO THE MEMORY OF

A Dear Mother,

WHOSE GENTLE, LOVING PRESENCE BRIGHTENED AND HALLOWED MANY RECURRING CHRISTMAS-EVES IN THE BOYHOOD OF

THE COMPILER.

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CHRISTMAS-EVE IN A LIGHT-HOUSE;

OR,

A Batch of Old Stories Re-told.

BY HENRY S. HICKS.

CHAPTER I.

PROLOGUE—CHRISTMAS EVE—"THE WILD IRISHMAN."

'Tis "Christmas Eve" in mighty London. Not one of your more modern and degenerate seasons, charged with foggy miasma and rainy discomfort, chilling one to the very "joints and marrow," and converting every available yard of earth into a "Slough of Despond," but a real, roaring, old-fashioned season—just such a one as poor Dickens loved to discourse on and share in—with the streets, ankle deep in snow whilst the whirling flakes circle and eddy around the amply enveloped wayfarer; every portico and balcony fringed with a border of icy pendents; while the trees in the parks have for the nonce hidden their soot-begrimed limbs under a feathery raiment not their own.

It is cold, *very* cold, but the streets are gay with an ever-shifting crowd of busy passers-by—some in cabs and 'busses, and a vastly larger proportion on foot—pushing and jostling along the pavement with varied gait and aspect, but all alike intent on one main end and object: a suitable preparation for the observance of the great Christian festival of the morrow. Here and there, skirting the tide of traffic, may be seen some waif of society, whose shabby exterior and heavy, slouching tread proclaim a stolid and despairing indifference to the cheering influences of the season; but these are in an infinitesimal minority, and

only offer an eloquent and touching contrast. Let us stand for a moment at the portals of the famous "Angel Tavern," "in merrie Islington," and, lo, what a tide of restless energy streams by. The great bell of St. Tudno's Church has just clanged forth the hour of two, and the city is pouring forth a rushing contingent of spruce clerks and active bank messengers, for whom the custom of the season has secured a welcome respite from the wonted thraldom of a high stool in a musty office, and the incessant wielding of the customary goose-quill. There goes a tall young fellow from the Stock Exchange. He intends spending *his* Christmas far beyond the sound of Bow Bells, amid the comforts and enjoyments of a cozy country house in pleasant Surrey, where "bulls and bears" will for a time cease to trouble or affect him, in token whereof a smart, well-packed "Gladstone" lies at this moment duly deposited in the trim cloak-room at King's Cross. Close to our friend's elbow trudges the confidential clerk of Messrs. Smiteall & Starvem, the eminent legal practitioners of Lime street Chambers, a most respectable and responsible firm, whose successfully employed strategy in the great D—— case is even now a favorite topic in circles where legal luminaries "most do congregate" and shine. Mr. Carlton Judkins, or "Rooky" Judkins, as he is sometimes irreverently called by the "juniors," amongst themselves, in probable allusion to his suit of "irreproachable black," is a well-preserved gentleman of five and forty, with a shrewd, calculating face and a sonorous voice, at once a terror to all opposing candidates for forensic success, and a "thing of joy" to Messrs. Smiteall & Co., in whose service "Rooky" has vegetated from very boyhood, entering as office boy, and mounting step by step the ladder of promotion until, with the top-most rung, he has attained his present position. It is needless to say he is unmarried—all confidential clerks seem to be bachelors—and in his right hand he bears the annual Turkey which shall go far toward ameliorating the acid temper of his worthy landlady in Kingsland, who "ca'nt abear to be worrited," and for whom "Old Father Christmas" has no subtle charm.

But we must not linger to watch paterfamilias on his varied round of visits, chief amongst which are the butcher and poulterer,(to say nothing of the wine-merchant,) nor can we stay to follow his wife and charming daughters on their *own* private shopping expedition for our Christmas, dear reader, is to be spent far away from the busy hum of city activity, and time presses; so hailing a "hansom," and shouting, "Euston" we dash down Pentonville-hill past Kings Cross into the Euston road, and speedily pull up with a jerk at the classic portals of the station itself. Our train will not start until five minutes past three, and the hands of the clock in the entrance hall have scarcely reached the quarter before the hour, so we have ample time to cast our eyes about us.

The depot at Euston Square is but a cheerless place at the best of times, even when the rays of the Summer sun may struggle through the dirt-coated panes of the great glass roof, whilst in the gloom of a December afternoon, and buried under a thick burden of snow, it is simply abhorent, and even the bright influences of Christmas fail to afford it a prepossessing appearance. And yet all is haste and bustle —outside cabs and broughams are continually discharging a crowd of intending passengers. Some red and worried as though the excitement of travelling entered but rarely into the routine of their tranquil lives. Others, and these by far in the majority, wear an appearance of careless indifference to the clamor and excitement around. Many of the latter are "city men" who have left their snug offices for cozy villas in the pleasant suburbs of Harrow or Watford. Inside is a perfect babel of noise and confusion, hotel-porters staggering half hidden under immense piles of luggage, which they are wheeling towards outgoing trains. "Guards" rushing wildly about jotting down carriage numbers in cute looking little way-books;—others in anxious attendance on gouty old gentlemen, from whom they anticipate a liberal fee, newsboys bawling the latest edition of the afternoon papers, engines shrieking and whistling, doors slamming, inspectors shouting, bells ringing; all these and a hundred other sounds confuse and half

annihilate the timid *voyageur*, and amidst it all with quick gliding motion our train, the "Wild Irishman," backs into the station and prepares to receive its freight and passengers. Meanwhile a little at one side from the main tide of traffic stands a man apparently about forty years of age, tall and massive, with square shoulders and well set head, his frame the very impersonation of manly strength, whilst the clear eye and well chiselled nose and mouth give evidence of a natural strength of character intensified by admixture with the rough elements of a hard and callous world. Regard him well, my reader, you are to journey together.

Amid the many thousands who are keeping this merry Christmas-Eve, in the year of Grace, 1859. I imagine few possess a smaller measure of home ties than those owned by our hero, Basil Wilton. The only son of a village surgeon, in the pleasant county of Dorset, and reared in the midst of delightful scenery, comprising hill and dale, breezy down and gentle upland—life, for him glided along very smoothly until he had reached his eighteenth year, when a sudden change in the professional prospects of an indulgent father rendered it imperative that he should commence the battle of life on his own account, and he selected the metropolis as the field of his exertions. By the aid of old and influential friends to whom the alteration in Dr. Wilton's circumstances created no diminution in friendship, Basil was enabled to procure a comparatively comfortable situation in the office of a large tea-broker in Mincing-Lane, and possessing naturally a winning and attractive manner with good abilities, he speedily ingratiated himself into the good opinion of the head of the firm, and for a time all went evenly and well. But soon the close restraints of city life began to prove irksome and Basil made up his mind to seek a wider acquaintance with the outside world of which he had heard and read so much. One momentous morning, to the utter amazement of his chief, he walked into the private office and quietly intimated his desire to be relieved from his duties as soon as possible, and a month later saw him on the deck of the "Sidonian," en route for New York. Forty

or forty-five years ago the United States offered a very fair field for the energies and capital of the emigrant, and by dint of hard, persistent push, Wilton speedily laid the foundation of his fortunes—and this once accomplished—to a nature such as his the rest was easy, and three months before this story opens, he returned to his native country a comparatively rich man, owning considerable real estate in the land of his adoption, and not without hopes of one day returning home for good and all, and passing the remainder of his days in quiet comfort. During the first few years of his expatriation he had kept up a pretty steady correspondence with his father—his mother had died during his infancy—but by degrees his letters had dwindled down to an occasional note, and at last had ceased altogether. So that it was with an anxious heart he again set foot on the shores of Britain, and hurried fast as the iron-horse could carry him to the post-town nearest the home of his early years. As he leant back in the chaise which he had chartered and gazed on each well-remembered spot—all seemed peaceful and unchanged—just as he had left it on the morning of his departure for Liverpool, and yet he felt a strange throbbing at his heart, which somehow or another seemed to his overstrained nerves to take the form of a knell foretelling impending calamity. But why dwell longer on the reception that awaited him. The grey-headed father, worn out by misfortune and care, lay side-by-side with the wife of his youth beneath the shadow of the ivy-clad village church, and the strong man shed tears of unavailing agony as he knelt by the graves of those who had given him birth. Dr. Wilton had migrated into Dorsetshire from a distant part of England on the occasion of his marriage, which for some reason or another had proved immensely distasteful to his family, who would never afterwards recognize him so that with the loss of his remaining parent, Basil Wilton parted with his only relative. The few who remembered him at all were content to offer him a tardy hospitality, after he had already been quartered several days at the village inn and then in a tone and manner which implied at once a desire for his refusal, and an expectation that it would be given. Only

one true friend remained, in the person of the Rector of Welford—his father's greatest intimate and sole executor—and from him Basil gleaned the melancholy details of his dead parent's last hours, from the same hand receiving the scanty remnants of property which fell to his lot—all that had been saved from the grasping avarice and covetous hands of a horde of blood-sucking creditors. Ten days sufficed to settle everything, and having complied with the necessary legal formalities, Basil found himself once again in the British metropolis, without occupation, except an occasional correspondence with his agent in the States—a mere unit in the vast civilized expanse of London life. For a time the novelty of his situation pleased him by its very charm, and he was quite content to mix in the gaities his position afforded, but soon the old sense of unrest again crept upon him, latent energies cried out for occupation, and, at the approach of Christmas, old memories reasserted themselves and spoke of days long buried in the past, when the Advent season was something more to him than a name; when the holly and mistletoe wreathed the walls of the old home at Welford; when the village choir ushered in the cheery festival by a regular matinee of music and song; when the mummers performed their grotesque comicalities, and dragged the the great beech yule-log to the hall kitchen, where the Squire kept open house from Christmas-Eve to Twelfth Night. Oh, those were gay, happy times, and when Basil Wilton had conjured up the ghost of the past, he found, like many before him, and probably as many others will feel after him, that the phantom of memory is difficult to exorcise, and so he straightway determined to go back to his fields and plantations in thriving Indiana, there to form still other ties and associations, and so quit the old country forever. Before, however, he was able to carry out his intention, an important business engagement necessitated his presence in Dublin, and it is in pursuance of this object that we find him an intending passenger by the "Wild Irishman" on Christmas eve. The cry, oft repeated, of "tickets, gentlemen;" "all tickets ready," recalls our friend to the fact that he has not as yet either procured his

modest-looking bit of pasteboard or secured a seat in the first-class through carriage, labelled Holyhead; so, hastily summoning a porter, and consigning to him his rug, portmanteau and hat-case, with an injunction to secure him a corner seat in the coupè allotted to those desirous of smoking, he hurries to the ticket office, and by the transfer of sundry coins of the realm, returns with the permit entitling him to travel through to Dublin in company with Her Majesty's mail. There is something always touching in the surroundings of the last moments immediately preceding the departure of a train for distant points from a large railroad depot. So many sympathies are involved—so many severances take place. Some for a longer or shorter period —some forever. The passengers are generally far more cheerful than the friends left behind; the excitement of the journey is upon them; they have no time to moralize or dwell on any of those contingencies which present themselves unbidden to the relatives and friends they may leave behind. But we have no time for further soliliquy—our iron-winged monster is snarling impatiently, and precisely at five minutes after three with a shrill whistle we glide rapidly out of the station. We are timed to stop but once in the seventy-seven miles intervening between London and Rugby, and then only for a few minutes in order to pick up the mail bags at Blisworth. So our speed after passing Willesden rapidly increases until we are pounding away to the tune of at least forty miles an hour. Rugby is reached at 5:10, and here the passengers alight for a brief ten minutes of refreshment. Basil, who has lunched before leaving London, finds ample amusement in watching the various groups on the platform and the busy scene at the gaily-decorated bookstall, where a flourishing trade is being accomplished in Christmas annuals, straps, rugs, reading lamps, and the latest papers. But the ten minutes are soon over, and we are off again. The air grows colder and travellers wrap their robes closer about them and dilligently apply themselves to the task of rendering themselves as comfortable as circumstances will admit, lights

begin to twinkle from cottage casements as we dash with a reverberating roar through the outskirts of quiet villages or flourishing market towns, and almost before we have time to properly settle ourselves for a nap we find we are first at Stafford, then Crewe, and finally awake under the gray walls of quaint old Chester. The river looks cold in the moonlight, and the white mantle of snow on the Roodee gleams and glistens like an expanse of glass, whilst upon the night air is borne, sweet and clear, the refrain of some distant band of carol singers as they chant the staves of a popular Christmas ditty. Another brief interval for recuperating the inner man and again we pursue our iron road. Queen's Ferry is passed, and we are speedily across the border and within the limits of the country of Cadwallader and Llewellyn—the land of Druid rites and Bardic song. There are but few passengers now, the surplus having alighted at Chester, and our previously long train is reduced to an engine, mail and guards' van, and two carriages. In the solitary first-class compartment sit our friend Basil Wilton, Major Ponsonby, a retired officer of Indian cavalry; Henry Marston, managing clerk to a firm of London engineers; and Stanton Bell, a smart young American from New Hampshire. All four smoke, and thus a bond of union has sprung up, so that between the puffs of fragrant Havanas, or milder cheroots, a disjointed conversation has arisen. "It must be getting late?" queries the Major. Nearly half-past nine replies Bell, pulling out his Waltham, and we are but just at Rhyl. The mail train is late to-night but we shall pull up between here and Conway, its a good clear run with few grades of any importance, and we then get a fine stretch of road to Bangor. By this time the storm had risen to great violence and at every blast the train fairly rocked, altho' its pace was in no way impeded or lessened. At Bangor the guard came to the carriage window inquiring whether or no either of the gentlemen would care to alight and sleep in the town, as the Station-master had just received a telegram from Holyhead to the effect that it was extremely doubtful whether or no the Dublin steamer would cross in the teeth of the gale,

whilst Hotel accommodation in Holyhead was very limited. The quartette were, however, unanimous in their determination to proceed, so after getting their pocket-flasks re-filled, and laying in a good supply of creature comforts at the melancholy-looking refreshment room, where a young lady in corkscrew ringlets dispensed such fare as Bangor afforded, they again resumed their seats and the train proceeded. And now commenced the wildest portion of the journey. The snow lay piled almost to the heighth of the carriage windows, which were covered with a thick outer coating of ice. Both driver and fireman were muffled up almost beyond recognition, and only by the exercise of feet and hands could they keep these members from freezing. On the one side the sea roared and lashed in wild fury, whilst at times one wave more adventurous than the rest would fairly sweep the track before the advancing train. On the other the white slopes of the Welsh mountains rose dark and forbidding, their summits lost in the impenetrable mist that hung around them black as a funeral pall. Across the heavens rushed vast masses of clouds, now dark, now fleecy white, half-hiding the Winter moon, and at times burying it altogether from sight, whilst the forked lightning scintillated in coruscations of fire. In deed and truth a wild Christmas-Eve. But still the Mail dashed on as tho' regardless of the strife of elements that surged around over the wonderful bridge at Menai—through the dark pine woods of Anglesea—under the shadow of giant rocks and then plunging deep into the recesses of some gloomy tunnel until twinkling in the distance appeared the welcome lights of Holyhead, and here for a time our journey ceases. Eager and anxious were the queries lavished upon the Railway officials on arrival: "Will the boat start?" "Is the weather likely to clear?" "How about the mail-bags?" These and a dozen other questions were at once disposed of by the single reply from the inspector: "Gentlemen, until the weather lifts the steamer dares not venture outside the breakwater; it would be perfect madness to attempt it, but there is a large fire in my office which is very much at your service."

The warm interior of the Inspector's room was a welcome exchange for the cold discomfort of a railway carriage and the offer was accepted as readily as it was extended. The apartment owned but a solitary occupant in the person of the Doctor from Porthenna, a village some eight miles from Holyhead, who had been kept late in attendance on a patient, and who courteously rose on the entrance of our travelers and made way for them to approach the ample fire which blazed in a large, old-fashioned grate." A cold night, gentlemen," said he. Have you journeyed far? All the way from town, replied Wilton, and speaking for myself, I should be glad still to continue my journey to Dublin, but it appears that owing to the storm the confounded mail steamer will not cross to-night? And quite right too, returned the Doctor—it is one of our worst winter gales. On just such another night as this, the ill-fated "Windermere" went to pieces on the rocks below, and with such a warning before him, to say nothing of a hundred others, my friend the captain of the "Victoria" is far too wise and skillful a seaman to endanger his craft and reputation by any exhibition of foolhardiness. Were you resident here at the period of the catastrophe inquired Stanton Bell? I was then in practice in a village much nearer to Holyhead, and was amongst the first to arrive on the scene which will never be effaced from my mind as long as memory lasts. As I before stated it was just such another night as this—worse if anything—and although our brave boatmen did all that men could do in the effort to save life their humane endeavors were crowned with but a scant measure of success. The appliances, then, were not what they are to-day, and our solitary life-boat had gone round the Head to take off the crew of a coaster which had hoisted signals of distress, and which shortly afterwards foundered, so that our only resource lay in a rocket apparatus by means of which a rope was carried on board the ill-fated vessel, and by this means nine passengers and seamen were rescued. One of our fishing boats was swamped before it could cross the bar, and two poor fellows, named Owen Williams and John Jones, were lost. I can assure you it was a sorry day for

Anglesea and for many other nooks and corners in our land. Two hundred and seventy-nine bodies were washed on shore, and the work of identification and interment went on uninterruptedly for nearly a fortnight. Have no means been since taken, doctor, in order to avert a like castastrophe asked the Major? I am glad to say Government has shown itself fully alive to the dangers and necessities of the coast, and the Trinity Board a year or two ago erected a fine light-house on the summit of the "Stack" furnished with a powerful electric light which may be discerned from a long distance even in the thickest weather. Forbes, the keeper, is an old acquaintance of mine, and, if, gentlemen, you are not afraid to again face the weather, and brave a walk of a mile and a-half over a somewhat rough road, I shall be happy to act as your conductor to the "Stack Light." Poor Forbes and his mate lead but lonely lives, and will be overjoyed to receive company especially at a season when, if possible, no man should be left lonely or isolated. Besides, I fancy that "*Christmas-Eve in a Light-house*" will probably be a new experience to all of you. The four expressed themselves as highly delighted to avail themselves of the good doctor's offer, the prospect of adventure was a welcome one, so after a plentiful libation of brandy and water, of which the village Æsculapius sparingly partook, instant recourse was made to great coats and wrappers (ulsters were not then in vogue), when, just as all were equipped in marching order, the door opened and our friend, the inspector, entered followed by a quiet, reserved little man, who was introduced as Mr. Stent. On hearing of the proposed excursion, the two latter begged to be allowed to accompany the party,—a request readily granted. So after leaving word with the railway official that they would return in two hours, off they started. A glance at the station clock in the booking-office as they passed through showed that it was five minutes to eleven o'clock, so that by dint of rapid walking they could reach the "stack" by half-past. A shorter cut existed than that by the road, but the state of the weather utterly precluded its use.

Doctor Cuming led the way with a quick, powerful stride, and the rest followed in spite of the heavy storm of wind and snow with which they had to contend. After proceeding fully three-fourths of the whole distance a sudden turn in the road—which curved sharply round a spur of the cliff—brought them under the influence of a volume of light, so strong and powerful as to be almost blinding after the almost cimmerian darkness through which they had come. This was the famous "Stack Light," so well known to every mariner who has crossed St. George's Channel to or from Liverpool, and a few minutes longer walk sufficed to bring the party to the entrance. Ascending a short, wide stairway, our travellers found themselves in front of a massive door thickly studded with iron, which after a short parley was opened in answer to the Doctor's knocks, and the visitors cordially invited to enter. On doing so they found themselves in a circular whitewashed apartment, plainly but comfortably furnished with a small centre table, chairs, kitchen utensils, and even a book case, which rested against the wall. A cheery fire burnt in an open stove, and a swing lamp stood on a bracket inserted in the wall, whilst a circular iron staircase led from this apartment, through a series of others, to the summit of the lighthouse. The next above the lowest was the sleeping apartment of the two keepers, then the lamp-filling room, then the trimming room, and so on. The walls were so thick and massive as to almost entirely shut out the noise of the storm, and the first-feeling of the visitors was one of peace and security. The excitement of the trip had quite banished all desire for sleep, so they eagerly acquiesced in the keeper's proposal, that they should inspect the lanterns, and, after disencumbering themselves of their overcoats, up they went. It was a long, stiff pull to the top, but there was much of interest to be seen on the way, making the ascent gradual and easy. As for the lanterns, they were superb, and fully justified the enconiums lavished on them by Keeper Forbes, who seemed to bestow on them almost the affection of a parent. Bright and clear, they shone out the embodiment and im-

personation at once of warning and security. Many an anxious mother has had to thank these silent watchers, who never relax their vigilance for the life of her sailor boy off that wild coast, and many a manly heart has gazed upon them with feelings of devout thankfulness when safely riding out a December gale. Who has not read the touching story of Man's fight with the Sea, on wild Eddystone, which is but a specimen of the brave old Saxon courage and persistence which have rendered America and Great Britain the nations they are to-day—On again descending into the lower room the keeper invited the visitors to be seated and produced sundry long bottles of suspicious appearance whilst a tea kettle sang merrily on the hob.

The doctor was the first to break the silence. "What do you think of the weather, friend Forbes? Is it likely to clear?" "I don't think so," was the response, "with the wind blowing from its present point, we are just as likely to have a continuance of the gale for hours yet." If you will take an old sailor's advice, gentlemen, you will rest content here until morning, when the weather may lift This hospitable offer was gratefully accepted and it was proposed by Stanton Bell that in order to while away the time each member of the party should relate some story of personal experience, with the only proviso that the narrator should confine himself to actual facts in which he himself had a share. With the cordial assent, therefore, of the whole party, the major was asked to break the ice by leading the way.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAJOR'S STORY—HOW I WON MY WIFE.

Is it better to pass Christmas in town or in the country? Much may be said on both sides of the question, and it is very difficult to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, but in spite of all the wondrous preparations which may be made in London to give King Christmas his fitting welcome, there is much to be said in favor of the country; and, perhaps, nowhere observance is better done to his rites than in good old fashioned country houses, where a party, which would contrive to be merry under any circumstances, seize the excuse for the extra festivity which the season of the year affords. This was, at any rate, the custom at Plas Coed, an old house in North Wales, where occurred the events I am about to relate.

A pleasanter breakfast-room than that at Plas Coed probably does not exist in the kingdom, nor would it be easy to gather together a party better calculated to please and amuse themselves and each other than that which was seated round the table on the morning when my story opens. Assuredly I would not have changed my place on any consideration, seeing that, as usual, I had found a seat next to Nellie Stanyer, the elder daughter of our kind-hearted hostess. Perhaps this circumstance may have made the view from the windows even more exquisite than usual, though at any time it would have been hard to look without admiration over the tops of the splendid old trees clothing the sides of the hill at the summit of which the house stood. To the left is a mountainous country, pasture on some of the hills, others craggy and barren, but of noble outline; and to the right a glimpse of a few of the houses which are springing up rapidly at Llanormedd Bay, some two miles distant, and turning that pleasant retreat into a popular watering-place—'improving' away all its beauty, and vulgarising even the magnificent Rocky Head by making roads, round which the too-festive excursionists will dash and drive the miserable ponies which, for their

sins, are here for hire. The authorities believe that the wild and romantic aspect of the place will be improved if they can manage to construct a tramway along the mountainside!

From Plas Coed, however, we only catch glimpses of the water, lit up occasionally by the gleams of a sun which is struggling to assert itself, and certainly distance, in this case, does lend enchantment to the view.

'Breakfast is ready,' announces Annie Stanyer, a piquant little girl of sixteen. 'Mr. Nuttall,'—to the popular dramatist of that name, who was standing at the window, gazing over to the Bay—'are you building castles in the air?'

'Well, I was certainly looking for a *rent in the clouds;* perhaps that's the same thing,' he answered, taking his seat.

'Don't be brilliant before breakfast, Nuttall. Your stock of epigram and spontaneous repartee won't last the day if you begin to fire it off so early,' remarked Frank Hayton, a young novelist, who was just making a name.

'What is to be done to-day?' Mrs. Stanyer inquired. 'I shall drive into Llanormedd about eleven, if any one likes to go with me.'

'And the band will be playing in the Assembly Rooms,' Annie Stanyer informed us, 'though I don't know whether that's much attraction. Mr. Nuttall says, "if music be the food of love," lovers who listen to the Llanormedd band must suffer rather severely from indigestion.'

We honored the dramatist's joke, and Hayton explained it at considerable length to Percy Hawthorn, a young dragoon of limited intelligence, who was reported to have been the originator of the criticism that he considered Hamlet 'a good play, only it was so deuced full of quotations.'

'The doctors must do a good trade there, then,' Hayton hazarded, 'for I never saw so many young couples in various stages of the overpowering passion which conquers all things, though it is so usually at the seaside.'

'Otia si tollas, periere Cupidinis arcus,' muttered the Dean, who seemed to regret that he had found much leisure

in his youth, for Mrs. Dean was reported to have a temper. We, however, gave the girls a complimentary translation of Ovid's somewhat unflattering proverb.

'Whom do you think we saw yesterday?' Ethel Dyson asked. 'You remember taking us to see "Twelfth Night," Mrs. Stanyer? The actor who played Sir Toby so cleverly was in the Assembly Rooms.'

'Oh! I should so like to see him in real life,' Annie Stanyer cried. 'Do you know him, Frank? Is he nice?'

'You talk about a low comedian as if he were a strawberry cream,' responded Hayton, who was on sufficiently intimate terms to tease the careless speaker. 'I have a very slight acquaintance with Mr. Melliship, and consider him to be amusing and agreeable one.'

'And that *is* being nice, and my one adjective is much more terse and expressive than your two,' she answered with mock dignity.

'He's rather an intimate friend of yours, isn't he, Major,' Nuttall asked me.

'Yes, I see a good deal of him in town,' I replied; 'he's a very good fellow.'

'Would he like to see the place, do you think?' Mrs. Stanyer asked, with her usual ready kindness. The grounds of Plas Coed, and certain old rooms in the house, are among the sights of the neighborhood, and visitors are admitted two days a week. 'Will you ask Mr. Melliship to come up and dine with us? If you take the dog-cart you can bring him back.'

Annie Stanyer clapped her hands. 'Oh, that will be amusing and agreeable,' she exclaimed, making a little *moue* at Frank Hayton, as she avoided her favorite phrase.

Breakfast over, I was soon on the road to Llanormedd, and almost the first person I saw was Melliship, coming down the steps of the hotel.

'What are you doing here?' I asked, as we shook hands.

'Taking a rest,' he answered. 'Rather out of sorts. I gave up my part to Clarkstone, and came here for quiet—of which there's a good deal about here, by the way; in fact, "in contempt of question," it's dull.'

'"Visitors will find this a most agreeable winter resort, and in the constant round of entertainments provided, those who honor Llanormedd with their patronage can hardly fail—," I quoted.

'Yes, my dear fellow, I know. I've read that in the advertisements.'

'There's a skating-rink,' I remark.

'Thank you, yes. When I want to break any limbs, I can do it more effectually off the rocks.'

'Go for a ride?' I suggest.

'Thank you again. I went; and what is very much more extraordinary, I came back again, though the animal I went on would make an excellent substitute for the rink or the cliffs as regards probabilities of damaging oneself. I noticed the brute looked about him as he was led out, and asked the hostler if he didn't shy. "Noa, inteed, he was never shy"—here Melliship gave a laughably exact imitation of the Welshman's manner of speaking—"Inteed, he was look at things a little sometimes, sir." However, I got on, and walked him cautiously out of the town. As soon as we turned out of the main road, the brute—well, I suppose it wasn't *shying*, but he "looked at something," so very rapidly made up his mind that he didn't like it, and turned right round so very suddenly, that I didn't care to interfere with his evident wish to go home. But what are you doing here, Major? I'm very glad that your'e doing something, whatever it is.'

'I'm staying, on a visit,' I answered.

'Are you free to-day! I want to go up to that old house in the distance. I'm told there's a splendid view and some good pictures. Will you come? It's open to visitors, isn't it?'

'It's open to you. In fact, I drove into town on purpose to ask you to come and dine. That's where I'm staying.'

'Bless you, very much. I will strive to bear up against separation from the band. We'll away to the mountain's brow as soon as you like.'

'How well the house looks from here,' Melliship remarked, as I turned the dog-cart off the highroad down the

Plas Coed Lane. 'I never saw such high hedges, and the avenue must be magnificent when the leaves are on the trees. Shall I walk? This is a tremendous pull for the horse, up this hill.'

'No, don't trouble; we get to smoother ground directly,' I answered; and we soon reached the doors.

The men were shooting or riding, but a party of girls escorted their guest to the picture-gallery and to the terrace at the end of the grounds. Annie Stanyer glanced furtively at Melliship now and then at first, and seemed surprised to find a quiet, gentlemanlike personage in place of the rollicking Sir Toby she had seen at the theatre. The actor's quaint remarks soon established a feeling of intimacy on all hands, however, for laughter conduces to friendliness and ease more quickly than anything else; and by dinner-time Melliship was firmly fixed in Annie's good graces. Nuttall was on familiar terms with the actor, who, indeed, had done much to make the young author's first comedy successful. Hayton, as we have seen, knew him slightly, and he was soon at home among us.

'Who was that odd-looking scoundrel—if he will permit me to call him so—that you were talking to, Stanyer, as I came up the avenue?' Hayton asked our hostess' son as we sat down to table.

'That's precisely the question I put to the odd-looking scoundrel, without gaining a very satisfactory answer. He said he was a "pore man," and he supposed he could walk along the road as well as anybody else. I told him that his supposition was incorrect, as the road was private; and he lurched off.'

'A person of rather disreputable appearance was sitting on a gate, smoking, as I came by just now,' I said. 'He touched his hat and slouched away when he saw me. He looked rather like poaching.'

'Taffy was a thief,' Nuttall quoted. 'Perhaps that's it. I noticed the fellow as we passed, and, from the way he tried to appear at ease, one could see that he didn't want to be observed.'

'"Rien n'empêche tant d'être naturel, que l'envie de la paroître," Rochefoucauld once said—a maxim which some

young members of your profession might advantageously ponder, Mr. Melliship,' Hayton observed.

'What does that mean, Hayton?' inquired Hawthorn. 'I don't understand French. I'm like that fellow with long hair in the play you were just talking about.'

'"I would I had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and ——"'

'Hush!' interrupted Nellie in a whisper, laying her hand on my arm.

I turned to her, wondering what was the matter; for we had been talking of the comedy which had been the chief success of the past season, and appropriate quotations from it, in the tone of the various characters who had played, were popular at Plas Coed. My wonder, however, was speedily satisfied.

'As I had been speaking, the butler, a new servant whom I had not seen, had entered the room. He addressed his mistress, and I absolutely started with surprise, for his voice—a very peculiar one—was exactly the same in tone and accent as that of Morton, the actor who played Sir Andrew, and whom I was imitating. The others noticed it, as, indeed, no one could help doing, and Melliship looked up with open-mouthed astonishment. Then, of course, I comprehended Nellie's action, and was grateful for being saved from the awkwardness which I should have felt.

It need not be said that Sir Andrew was quoted no more till dinner was over; but when the servants had left the room Nuttall spoke.

'How extremely odd! I never heard any voice like Morton's before. Your imitation is very good, Ponsonby, but that man's speech is the absolute counterpart. May I ask what his name is, Mrs. Stanyer?'

'His name is James Payne. His way of speaking reminded me of some one, but I could not remember of whom until just as Major Ponsonby spoke. Paine has been away, and only returned this afternoon.'

Melliship was an excellent *raconteur* and vocalist, and when he saw how eagerly Annie Stanyer and her companions listened to everything he said of the strange world

of whose customs they knew nothing, good-naturedly laid himself out to amuse; and with anecdotes and songs the evening passed, and half-past eleven o'clock came all too soon.

'Must you go? Will you order the dog-cart?' said Mrs. Stanyer to her son. 'It's not late yet, you know, Mr. Melliship.'

But Melliship expressed his preference for walking.

'I'm sure you had better drive, Mr. Melliship,' Annie said; 'and then you can stay a little longer.'

'You are very good, Miss Annie.'

'Not a bit! It's all selfishness, because you are so kind to us,' the little lady answered.

'The walk will be pleasant if Ponsonby will show me the way; and it's a terribly steep hill for a horse—to say nothing of the darkness.'

'If you had rather walk, then good night; and I hope you will come and see your friend here whenever the attractions of Llanormedd are not too powerful,' Mrs. Stanyer said.

'Yes, do please come again very soon, Mr. Melliship,' Annie added, shaking hands; and, adieux made, we descended to the hall to wrap up before facing the cold night air.

'It's chilly, after that hot room, isn't it? And how dark—as black as pitch. Do you know the way?' Melliship asked, as we closed the door and stepped out into the darkness.

'Take hold of my arm, old fellow. It's all right. I know every inch of the ground,' I answered. 'Look out! Seven steps.'

'I never saw anything so black. I shouldn't have believed that darkness could be so impenetrable. It's lucky we did not drive. We should have broken the horse's neck, and been upset into the bargain.'

'Upset into the ditch, you mean; only we shouldn't. It's often like this, and I've driven safely on as dark nights scores of times. Mind, here's a gate! Down here; this is the steep hill.'

'What delightful people those are!' Melliship said presently, when he had grown a little accustomed to the road, and could think of something else.

'It was very good of you to take such trouble to amuse them.'

'My dear fellow, it's a pleasure with people like that, who evidently don't ask an actor to their house and expect that he will play the fool to pay for the meat and drink he consumes. You know what North did at Richmond?'

'No; what?'

'Why, some City man has a house there, and asked North to dine; and he went down, and had a gorgeous feast, I suppose. After dinner the man who asked him said, "Now, would you give us one of your amusing recitations, Mr. North?" and the wife wished him "to go through that funny scene where he's hidden under the table and want's to sneeze." North rose, gravely bowed to the assemblage, put a couple of guineas on his dessert plate, and walked out.'

'A very proper rebuke. Mind! another gate. Now we're in the lane, and the turning to the right is the high-road. It will be late for Llanormedd when you get back.'

"'Not to be abed after midnight, is to be up betimes; and, *diluculo surgere*, thou know'st—'" he quoted, and I replied:

'"Nay, by my troth, I know not: but I know, to be up late, is to be up late."'

'"A false conclusion; I hate it as an unfilled can: to be up after midnight, and to go to bed then is early: so that, to go to bed after midnight, is to go to bed betimes. Does not our life consist of the four elements?"'

'"'Faith, so they say; but, I think, it rather consists of eating and drinking."'

'"Th' art a scholar; let us therefore eat and drink."'

'"In sooth, thou wast in very gracious fooling last night, when thou spokest of Pigrogromitus, of the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus; 'twas very good, i'faith! I sent thee sixpence for thy leman—hadst it?"'

'"I did impeticos thy gratillity."—Did you hear that?' Melliship asked, breaking off the dialogue.

'That' was a whistle, which seemed to come from the hedge a little behind us, and a response, or, at any rate, a second whistle, faint, but yet distinct, followed immediately.

'Is it a bird? Birds go to sleep before this. "Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon," don't haunt these parts, do they?'

'I should imagine not. Their chances of finding citizens traveling with fat purses would be rather small.'

'Ah! here's the highroad. I can see well enough, and it's almost straight. Don't come any further—no, really, I won't let you. Good-night! good-night, Ponsonby! You'll be over to-morrow? Look out for the poacher—perhaps it was he whistling. Good night!'

'Good-night! Don't get into the ditch,' I said, and turned to go up the lane. Melliship's words recalled to my recollection the rough who had been lounging about the place; for such men as he were exceedingly rare visitors to such an out-of-the-way spot as Llanormedd. He was not a Welshman. However, the girls did not often go about without escort, though it might be as well to warn them. It so soon grows dark, I thought, and in this lane between the high hedges———

I stopped and pulled out my cigar-case. Just as I was in the act of striking a match something touched my arm. I turned hastily and saw a man by my side, while a second, I could dimly percieve, was crawling from out the hedge. My first thought was to knock one down with my fist and, with a thick stick I carried, do what I could to break the head of the other as he was rising from the ditch; but before I could make out whether it was one of the keepers or a servant, the first man spoke:

'Jim,' he said, 'I heard your rum old cackle as you passed down the lane. It's a little earlier than you said. Who was the cove with you?"

It was evident the fellow mistook me for somebody else, and equally evident that his intentions were amicable. But for whom? And what could he mean by talking of my 'rum old cackle?' Stay! As I passed along I had been

imitating Sir Andrew; Melliship and I had, indeed, answered each other and kept up the dialogue for some time. And Jim? James Paine was the name of the new butler whose voice so exactly resembled the actor of the famous rôle from which I had been reciting. Clearly, these strange personages imagined that they were talking to the butler, with whom it would seem that they had made an appointment.

These thoughts flashed through my mind in a second, and as quickly I resolved on doing nothing to disturb the delusion.

'He's a groom at a house near here. Came up to see one at the stables,' I answered, adopting the voice which my companion had stigmatized.

'And it'll do to-night, you think?'

Now 'it' is a pronoun of very wide significance; and seeing that I had not the slightest idea of the word for which it stood, the question was a puzzler. Only one thing was palpable—something was wrong; and the advisability of knocking my interrogator on the head, and giving such alarm as I could, again suggested itself strongly. Before I could determine on any course, the man continued:

'No good waiting?'

'Don't see why you should,' I replied, with increasing wonder as to what it all meant.

'David's got the tools; though it's a pity you couldn't find the key of that safe in the library. Through the servants' hall is the best way, is it? I went up to try and get a look to-day when I thought them young fellows was all at their shooting, but one of 'em came up and was nasty.'

Little power of guessing was required to tell what this meant. Through the servants' hall to the library, and in the absence of the key, David—whom I presumed to be the furtive rascal who had crawled from the ditch and only indicated his presence by occasional grunts—had got the tools. This meant burglary; and as it happened, and as Paine probably knew, there was prospect of rich plunder, for Mrs. Stanyer's jewels and much plate, generally left at

their English house, had this year been brought to Wales. But I had a question to answer, and now entered heart and soul into the nefarious schemes of my strange associates.

'Yes, that's best. But don't come too soon. The young fellows are smoking. You'll see when the lights are put out, then wait about an hour, or at least until I show a candle three times,' I replied.

'All right! But how do you mean? Take this bull's-eye, that'll be better.' And David handed me a lantern.

'I must be getting back, or else they'll miss me.'

'Very well; and we'll get up to the shrubbery opposite the house. Hush!—what's that?'

Jim Paine coming down, I feared, to spoil the plot I had been concocting.

'Get into the hedge, and don't come out, whatever you hear, for the next half-hour,' I whispered; and set off to the house at my best pace, as David and the other, whose name I had not heard, scrambled through the hedge again.

It took me only a very few minutes to reach the house and rush into the brightly-lighted smoking-room—dazzling to the eyes after my excursion in the dark. The men were lounging in easy attitudes, with tall tumblers at their elbows.

'Hallo! what's the matter? You look as if you'd been running a race with a ghost!' Nuttall exclaimed.

'Let me prescribe soda and brandy,' Stanyer said.

'Is Paine in the house? Quick—tell me!'

'Yes—if he hasn't just gone out. He's forgotten to take some wine my mother told him to leave at the keeper's cottage,' Stanyer answered.

'He must not leave the house on any account. Excuse me. I'll explain directly. Call him back—run after him!' I urged.

'Why, my dear fellow! why mayn't William Evans' wife have her port wine?'

'Don't stop and talk, Stanyer. Pray do as I ask.'

'Paine!' he called out, opening the door—'Paine!'

I followed Stanyer across the hall, the outer door of which the butler—who must have heard himself called—was opening, his great coat on, and a basket in his hand.

'Yes, sir,' he said. 'I beg your pardon. I didn't hear you.'

'Come into this room, Ponsonby wishes to speak to you.'

'My mistress particularly wished,' the man began, following us back to the smoking-room.

'Never mind that, for a moment.' What is it, major?'

'I want you to forbid that man to leave the house to-night,' I said.

'He's only just going down to the cottage. Evans' wife is ill, and he's forgotten to take some wine and jelly to her.'

The men looked on with wonder, and Paine, though the twitching of his face showed that he was in dread, put on as placid an expression as possible.

'Yes, my mistress particularly wished the wine to be taken, and I'm sure she will be very angry if it does not go to-night.'

'What's it all about, Ponsonby? Why shouldn't he go?' Stanyer asked.

'Because he has an appointment in the lane with two ruffians who are coming up to rob the house to-night,' I replied.

The auditors sprang to their feet.

'What!' cried Stanyer, in extreme amazement. 'Oh, nonsense, my dear fellow! How do you know?'

Paine looked round for a moment to the door, but Hawthorn and some of the rest were behind him. Escape was impossible, and so he spoke with well-assumed calmness:

'It's worse than nonsense, sir, to take away a man's character. I've lived in several places, and no one ever dared to say——'

'Talking will do you no good,' I said. 'As I passed up the lane, two fellows jumped from the hedge and called me "Jim." Melliship and I had been speaking the dialogue of "Twelfth Night;" my imitation of Morton sounded like this fellow's voice, and, in the dark, they took me for him. If you lock him up in a cellar, and put a good guard on him, we shall catch the other two.'

Some of the other servants, greatly surprised at the ap-

pearance of things in general, were speedily forthcoming; and Paine, who perceived the futility of denial was escorted to safe quarters.

'My dear Ponsonby, I don't know what to say to you. How extremely lucky that you should have hit on this villainous plot.

'There's more to be done yet, however, though I don't anticipate much trouble. Put out the lights first of all. When Mr. Paine's friends make their rather unseasonable call, they propose to come in through the servants' hall; so we'll go and wait for them there. We mustn't make a noise, though they won't be here for nearly an hour,' I said, as we made our way to the hall and cautiously felt about in the dark for seats.

Time seemed to pass very slowly, but at length the moment for my first—and, I hope, last—participation in a burglary arrived, and, hushing for silence, I turned the bull's-eye three times on the window.

'Be ready,' I whispered to my friends, who, however, were sufficiently on the alert. 'Hush!'

A faint tap was heard on the other side of the glass. I drew up the blind and opened the window cautiously.

'Is it all right;' a gruff voice inquired as softly as it could.

'Quite!' I answered, helping the speaker through the window and then, bidding him stand quite still, performing a like office for David.

'Just give us the least speck of gas if it's all right. Then we shan't knock anything over and make a row, and we can find the way if we have to run for it—though I suppose you've took care,' the man murmured.

'I've taken every possible precaution, I assure you,' I answered, applying a match to the burner over my head.

In a moment the scene was revealed, and the astonishment on the faces of the newcomers, as they stood with open eyes and mouths, was so intense that there was no room for a look of rage. Instead of the solitude so necessary to the operations of which they were professors, they found themselves surrounded by seven wary young men.

The chances of escape were small, and their eyes were obviously searching for the unfortunate Jim. For a moment none spoke; and then, with muttered imprecation, the chief of the treacherous twain turned, and strove to reach the window. But I had taken the precaution of closing it; and whilst, with Stanyer's assistance, I slipped a rope round the arms of the first robber, Hawthorn and Hayton safely secured the astonished David.

How Jim Paine and his friends were tried and condemned need not be told in detail. Nellie Stanyer, preferring to regard as wisdom and adroitness what was really the result of chance, consented to bestow upon me the privilege of guarding her from robbers, and such of the other ills which flesh is heir to as may be averted by a husband's care—a happy result which was owing in part to my lucky imitation.

The major's story was vociferously applauded, and after a general replenishing of glasses and relighting of pipes and cigars, another volunteer was called for and was speedily found in the person of Harry Marston, who at once engaged the attention of his auditors by relating the following interesting reminiscence:

CHAPTER III.

THE MANAGING CLERK'S STORY—"A DELICATE MISSION."

"At the time I introduce myself to you, I, Harry Marston, son and heir of Henry Marston, of Holber Holt, Leicestershire, was an undergraduate of Christchurch, Oxford, of three years' standing, spending his 'long' vacation with his uncle, his mother's brother, Mr. Smith Pentland, solicitor, The Close, Southwich. I had many other relatives, especially on my father's side; but none of them had so much of my respect as this provincial lawyer with more than a provincial reputation. I don't boast of it, for I have not seen many men who could afford to look down upon

Smith Pentland ; I have seen as few who ventured to do it. To bring one proof of his superiority—he had to meet the clever man's supreme difficulty of bearing with incompetency, and he subdued it thoroughly.

Nevertheless, where he saw youth, and health, and intellect—it was his theory that opportunity should be measured apart—he was not easy to satisfy : the idle found him a hard taskmaster. In these respects my uncle was fairly content with me, but he was one of those who love to resort to argument for the sake of discovering what their opponent is made of. I am saying nothing for or against the practice, simply that he followed it. And a favorite course with him was to challenge us university men.

'The question is, are you not specialties?' he said, one day over our after-dinner wine.

You may picture my uncle a fine old figure, with great ridges of brows below an abundance of white hair, refined, almost gentle eyes, but marked caustic mouth, with somewhat large lips. There were those who went in fear of my uncle's sarcasm, but they did not fare best with him. 'The question is, are not you specialties?'

'Now you have put a hard case, sir,' said I. 'Because although it is not the truth, it is next to it. To my mind no man is more capable than your better sort of college man.'

'That is, put your college man into an unusual and difficult position, he will come out of it more creditably than your ordinary man.'

'I think so, sir.'

'It is contrary to the received notions, Harry.'

'But I do think it.'

It was one pleasant feature in my uncle's intercourse with young men, that he treated them as possibly his equals in intelligence, if not in judgment. And this without at all risking his dignity. The consequence was that young men tried to talk up to him.

'Seriously, don't you think you are too finished an article for common uses? I have my doubts of you, Harry, although my own boy is just going to Cambridge.'

'I wish you could put one of us on his trial,' I said, not consenting to his opinion. 'Me, since no one else offers.'

'I'll take you at your word, Harry,' said my uncle, suddenly. 'Mind—if you don't wish to do what I ask, say so; I shall respect your scruples. I want you to go to a gentleman's house in the neighborhood—it is just the case you desire, that I should make a real use of you—and take an inventory of the property on his premises.'

There is no doubt I was a great deal dismayed—my uncle's unusual and difficult position had certainly not taken this form to my mind.

'He is in a degree a friend of mine; but what more influences me, he is a great friend of great friends of mine. One of these will advance him money for present necessities, but requires a bill of sale on his furniture and horses and carriages as security. It is to be arranged for as early and privately as possible. Now there is not a clerk in my office I can trust as I ought to be able to trust you. My clerks contract a habit of reticence, I know, but they are as likely as not to betray that their errand is something sinister and unusual in their very effort not to do so. In fact, if a gentleman were to be found for such work, he is what is wanted. And you say college men are so capable;'—my uncle pushing back his chair, and looking sharply at me as he ceased speaking.

'You would like me to undertake it?' said I, dubiously.

'If you would, you see me out of a difficulty. However, if you at all object, there's an end. I'm thinking for the ladies of Mr. Guest's family mostly. You wouldn't, you know, want to mention your relationship to me or anything of that sort: you may not even see any of the family—although, honestly, I think you will.'

In spite of what he said about there being an end to it if I objected, yet, as he went on enumerating the fors and againsts, I saw which way his wishes tended. Besides, it struck me half the trial might be in seeing whether I could overcome my reluctance. So I made up my mind.

'Well, I will do my best, sir. To-morrow, do you say? I suppose its chairs and tables I'm to value. How am I to

know what to call 'em,' and I laughed without much satisfaction; 'or whether they be worth shillings or pounds?'

'As to calling them,' said my uncle, looking pleased, 'there'll be a list there ready for you. Your aunt and Flo might initiate you into prices—an evening's amusement provided for you all!'

That seemed likely to be the only agreeable item in the account. Florence kindly took a great deal of the burden off her mother, and we two made famous progress—considering a chronic flirtation between us of some years' standing.

However, next morning, when fairly started behind a good horse for my twelve miles' drive to Cullerton House, affairs took a different complexion. The business itself did not trouble me much: what I did not know I could arrive at by audacious guessing, and reference to *Florence* on my return. For the rest, was I not to demonstrate the capability of the Oxford man by the very fact of my tutored ability to carry off awkward circumstances? On my arrival at Cullerton House, a place of some pretensions, I sent in my card and a note my uncle had written, speaking of me as a gentlemen whom he employed confidentially. Waiting in a well-lined library for further directions, with a new sense of strangeness to such a place, I smilingly recurred to my uncle's advice not to go quite as for a morning call. By-and-by Mr. Guest made his appearance, very hurried and embarrassed.

'Mr. Marston, I believe,' referring to my card, which he held in his hand. 'Come upon—ah—Mr. Smith Pentland's business.' I bowed. 'How would it do to begin here at once?' he went on to say, with the air of a man screwing up his courage to taking the first uncomfortable header, but only equal as yet to dabbling in the water. 'It may be as well to—exercise a little artifice. You are waiting for me here, you—ah—understand. And if the servants come in——'

'There is occupation for some minutes of waiting on these shelves, sir,' said I, gravely.

'Exactly, Mr. Marston. Then here is a list for your guidance. I will return in a few minutes.' And to get himself

out of the room so quickly appeared an almost astounding relief to him. Completely beaten though he was by the present humiliating situation, one could see that by nature he was arrogant and somewhat overbearing. I could well understand what my uncle spoke of as Mr. Guest's perfect inability to keep within his income; for to him the small but very necessary economies of life would probably seem paltry and degrading. However he had bought a contrary experience, and was now paying for it.

We young fellows are more apt at detecting the absurdities than the hardships of such situations, and only behave well about them because, as men of the world, we do not, in our phraseology, go in for the embarrassing. But in rather an odd way I was to feel the pathos also. In going through the list prepared for me, I could not fail to perceive here and there a blotch of ink, hinting very sensibly at tears spent in the writing. It was the work of a lady—one of the Guests themselves probably. Should I see her? and how would she take it? Was anything to be made out from her workmanship? I set myself to examine it, but whether or not I have small penetration into character, it told me little. There was clear arrangement certainly, and completeness, if that went any way—and it did when one thought also of the blurred ink spots.

Voices outside warned me to put an end to my speculations, and make haste to be ready for Mr. Guest's return, which was only a degree less flurried than his first entrance. 'I think, Mr. Marston, if you would follow a plan——' Which plan, unfolded with much hesitation and diffusiveness, had evidently been prepared for him outside.

It was that luncheon should be ready in an hour in the dining-room. Mr. Guest was meanwhile to conduct me upstairs, as if for a little attention to my toilet after my journey. 'And don't you think you might jot down some of the articles in the hall as I stand with the door open; yes, so.' You may imagine the figure we made. 'And the rest you can carry in your mind as you pass through. A very handsome bird, as you remark, and well stuffed.' We were now in the hall and a servant was passing. 'John,

are the ladies in the breakfast-room? Come, and be introduced to my daughters, Mr. Marston.'

I could see that this, done the more effectually to mystify the servant, was bitterer work than any. He betrayed it by the very sharpness of tone, momentary as it was, in which he immediately after furnished me with certain information—as if to warn me not to presume upon an introduction that could not be avoided, but which went for nothing in the ordinary sense. I dare say the cautious, almost shy circuit my eyes made of the room and its inmates was ascribed by Mr. Guest to my sufficient sense of all this. Miss Alice Guest, the younger of the two ladies of the family, was sitting in a spiritless attitude by the fire: Miss Guest herself, a girl of about twenty, was writing at the table. And, although there were traces of tears on her face, and she could not help looking downcast, yet she was sufficiently composed to think for the best, and try to be conciliatory, as the most politic course. She was not quite pretty, but altogether nice; had nice soft, gentle ways—which did not in the least prevent her, as I was not long in finding out, from being the ruling power in the house. Indeed, with no one else did there seem to remain any judgment or endeavour. I felt for her very keenly when, upon her father appealing to her for the explanation of something in the inventory not quite clear to either of us, she came across to us and pointed out what we required quite patiently and intelligently, although all the while her poor hand trembled so that she could scarce turn over the leaves. I very much liked the kind, honest eyes that met mine in a momentary glance. I very much wished they had been less troubled.

And I decidedly wished myself well out of the room long before I had finished. The father was querulous, yet deprecatory; the girls sat on in an awkward silence. A young fellow of about eighteen looked in at the door, his father's introduction drew from him a stiff, hostile bow; turning on his heel he went out, closing the door with a bang: there was a dull anger shown towards me by all—by all except Miss Guest. I grew to feel almost as if the

aggression was mine; I said within myself that whilst my uncle had undoubtedly acted wisely and kindly by the Guests, he had not shown much consideration for me. True, he had professed to make it entirely optional, but then——

Going through with Mr. Guest's programme, I reached the dining-room and luncheon.

'Now do, Dick,' I heard Miss Guest say, from outside the door. 'He is very well, indeed he is. It can't hurt you to sit down to luncheon with him. It's because of the servants, you know. Do it to please me, Dick. I don't want you to talk if you can't, she added coaxingly—coming in as she spoke; Dick treating me to his anathemas pretty freely as he followed her.

The color flew into her face at sight of me, for certainly she had not meant me to be of her audience. I was sorely tempted to carry it with a high hand towards Mr. Dick, but I kept before me the especial reason of my uncle's choice, and recovered myself in time. I readily forgave him when I heard, as I did afterwards, that he was expecting his commission, when this unfortunate crisis in his father's affairs put off his expectations indefinitely; even if worse did not follow. It was natural he should confound me with his misfortune. The younger sister did not show herself. 'Alice has the headache, papa,' said Miss Guest, in answer to her father, as he too joined us. I guessed that I had as much to do with her absence as any indisposition.

But we had not taken our seats when a carriage rolled up the drive. 'Miss Bailey, papa!' Miss Guest exclaimed. 'She will have been into Lorton, and of course has come on here knowing it to be our luncheon hour.'

I quite understood their involuntary glances at me, and felt it incumbent on me to offer to retire. I offered to do so in so many words, without any preamble or reason alleged other than the real one.

'Certainly not,' she said, with the essential politeness of a kind nature. 'We could not think of it.' I still professed my willingness.

'It would be rude, and it would not be preferable even,' she replied, smiling a little, her straight:forwardness equal to my own. Well, it is the irresistible tendency, where it is young men and women who are concerned, for these things to become directly personal.

'True there are the servants,' said Mr. Guest, with an irritable glance in survey of me, fretting his hands nervously one within the other. 'And Miss Bailey won't see much in our having a—stranger to luncheon.' Words that could not have been better framed to lack the genuineness and spontaneousness of his daughter's reply.

Miss Guest's first alarmed exclammation was justified. Miss Bailey *had* calculated upon the luncheon hour, and besides developing a very fair appetite for the material viands set before us, also developed a quite remarkable craving after what ladies term 'news.' 'Well, Frances, what's the news?' was nearly her first question.

Miss Guest colored as she professed her ignorance—probably thinking, it struck me, what the answer to-morrow might well be. So Miss Bailey proceeded herself to impart sundry intelligence, in which Miss Guest, carrying off her secret trouble bravely (she could not keep back a little pre-occupied sigh now and then), feigned much interest; satisfied so that her father was not called upon. We appeared to be successfully tiding over the mal-àpropos visit, until, as luck would have it, the lady's inquisitiveness was directed towards me. Then I quite laid for everything to come to grief.

'Ah, I suppose, Mr. Marston, you are a stranger to this part of the country?' said she, catching quickly at words that implied as much. She was what I call a dreadful woman; well preserved, fifty or so, with a face placid yet shrewish; smiling benevolently on you with her eyes, but her mouth in contradiction.

I said I did not know much of the country. 'But perhaps you mean to get acquainted with it? Perhaps you are thinking to settle down amongst us?'

I said I was simply on a visit, and Miss Guest contrived to get the conversation into a different channel—but not for long.

'You find the air keen here, don't you, Mr. Marston?' said Miss Bailey, upon a discussion of the weather giving her an opening. 'I'm sure I did. But then I'm a native of Devonshire, and you may come from northward.'

I wished Devonshire had kept her, as I said that, on the contrary, I had always lived more to the south.

'In London, perhaps?'

'Bless the woman!' I thought. 'I'll try the truth—if that will stop her.' Hesitating a moment between Leicestershire and Oxford, I chose the latter. As it turned out, an unfortunate choice.

'At the university? Ah! At which college would it be? Christchurch? ah! She had a nephew, such a dear fellow, but he was at Brasenose. Did I know him!—Dawson, Frank Dawson? No, I didn't! Well, perhaps she might be able to bring about an acquaintance. Oh, Frances?' turning to Miss Guest. 'Alice Dawson has had the sweetest photograph taken.'

'Has she?' said Miss Guest, with the slightest drooping of the eyelids.

'Oh, the most charming portrait!' blandly beaming on us all. 'You have not seen my niece, Mr. Marstou—my niece, Alice Dawson, dear Frank's sister? She was staying at Southwich a month ago. If you were riding or driving Harford way, and looked in on my little snuggery, I *might*, now, be able to give you an introduction.'

Through all this questioning and my corresponding answers—for, once brought to book, I had plunged boldly *in medias res*, and talked Oxford to any extent, as deeming the truth safest, from being least open to suspicion on either side—as it went on from one assertion to another, Miss Guest's eyes had opened wider and wider, and even young Dick was roused from his moodiness. For all their caution, I caught them signalling their amazement at my audacity to each other with their eyes—and, I thought, also the relief my ingenuity, playing on Miss Bailey's credulity, brought them. But when it came to the proffered introduction, accompanied by all Miss Bailey's reserve of blandness, I thought they certainly must

have exploded with laughter; the better I kept my countenance the more I tried their gravity. As for Mr. Guest, he looked the reverse of amiable over what he took to be my effrontery. At length Miss Bailey proposed departure. They all accompanied her to the carriage, but whilst Mr. Guest remained for a parting word or two, Miss Guest and Dick made a speedy escape back into the hall. Chancing to be near the door, I had the fortune a second time to overhear them.

'Oh, Dick!' said she.

'Oh, Fanny!' and they went off into suppressed laughter, one against the other.

'Did you ever hear a chap cram like him?' said Dick, suspending his laughter only for the words.

'Dear Frank!' said she, as soon as she could get breath. 'And dear Frank's sister? But don't let us be stopping here.' And giving themselves a minute to recover themselves they came in.

I purposely caught Dick's eye, and he walked to the window as the sole resource against a second explosion; for being, as you will have observed, a young fellow quick to stand upon his dignity, of course he could not willingly demean himself to exchange mirth with a common clerk! But kind, thoughtful Miss Guest, quick to believe that kinduess was meant, could not let it pass without an acknowledgment of my good nature and promptness to avoid embarrassment for them. And she knew well, none better, how to thank without admitting too much. I felt it some return for the inevitable disagreeables of my work only to have had it in my power to put her in so much better spirits; this was just what her fine insight taught her, and by what she emphasized her thanks. She asked if she could be of any assistance quite cheerfully, and even conversed upon general topics a little. She only ventured on a passing allusion to my daring inventions—for as such she wholly regarded them—I was half sorry to know it—from beginning to end—over the luncheon-table, and that of the demurest.

'You appear, Mr. Marston, to be quite familiar with Ox-

ford ; even more so than with Southwich.' And in spite of herself, a smile lurked somewhere about her pleasant face.

'I—I—in fact, Miss Guest, I—I was apprenticed at Oxford.'

When I came to this point in telling the day's proceedings to my uncle, he laughed ten minutes off, and then admitted that I had extinguished him. 'As of course I should,' I affirmed. 'Merely from the result of a high-class education—which would, as a plain fact capable of being argued, be a recurrence to first principles and the simplest tactics.' When my uncle informed me my assurance, as he was pleased to call it, wanted no further elaborating.

I achieved my reply to Miss Guest in my gravest manner ; but she turned away, biting her lip, and, I could see, doubted my gravity, just as I had detected the *arrière pensée* in hers. I was strongly impelled to disclose the whole truth about myself, but the fear of compromising Mr. Smith Pentland restrained me until Mr. Guest and discretion entered together.

So I brought my business to a conclusion, and I drove away from Cullerton House and the Guests, feeling that I had also brought to a conclusion a strange experience for which nothing certainly in my life had prepared me, which branched off from it in an odd sort of way, without any kind of connection with it other than the slight accident of Mr. Smith Pentland's unpremeditated request, and which had at once passed into the catalogue of simple remembrances.

True, after I left Southwich I once or twice made inquiries for the Guests in my letters to my uncle. But the subject was no longer interesting after he wrote that there had been a revival in their fortunes—an old maiden aunt—some relative or other, dying and leaving them no end of a fortune. 'And,' said my uncle, 'to see Mr. Guest was enough to know that no odor of impending bankruptcy came now between the wind and his nobility.' My few hours' acquaintance with the gentleman taught me all that

my uncle would convey, and I was confirmed in my first reading of his character.

Christmas came, and was, as in duty bound, spent in the home at Holber Holt. We had an excessively good time of it; such a good, jolly time that nothing short of the wedding of my great chum, Tom Stopford, and the positive necessity he laid on me of acting as his best man, could have induced me to quit home for the Spotford's place in Sussex. Once at Hetton Park I found myself involved in festivities of a week's duration. These over, my return was still further delayed, because the good faith of Tom's brother Bob was—at least he said it was—implicated in the securing me for a grand ball that was to come off at Grill Hall—the residence of some new comers to that part of the county, whose favor Bob evidently sought. They had only not been of the company at Hetton because they were from home at the time. From what I heard on different sides, the Masons were city people, very rich, and without children. But the attraction for Bob, and others of the fellows as well, was certain two fair nieces whom they had met at Grill during the shooting season, and who were again the Masons' guests. The brother had also lately joined Bob's regiment. For Bob was in a crack cavalry regiment, and spent every farthing of his allowance and probably something over.

Poor Bob was very spooney and made me his confidant. He used to moralize frightfully, with a comic face, but not quite taking it all the same. 'I'm a younger son, Marston, and younger sons don't go down with mamas and aunts—especially where there's money. Hang money, I say! There's Tom's wife, as jolly a little girl as ever a fellow wants to pet him and think him perfection. Would she have fallen in love with me? Not she. And yet she isn't a bit in the world mercenary. She wouldn't have been *allowed*, my dear fellow. It is all *managed* for them. Oh, women are kittle cattle to deal with.' And Bob's weed went out of the window, and we sat on in a rather sentimental silence.

'So, as I said before, if you'll accept the Mason's invita-

tion, you do me a kindness,' he continued, as soon as he could descend to practical matters. 'You are credited with being a catch in the matrimonial market, and we younger sons are only looked pleasant upon when we have bigger fish in tow. Mrs. Mason was proudly pleased when she saw a possibility of getting Mr. Harry Marston. She doesn't fall into ecstacies, you know—quite goes in for the refined style of thing. But she's the deuce and all to come at. It was grand, I assure you, quite grand, to see how she manœuvred for Frank Carpenter, the swell who married old Mason's niece. These girls belong to her own people. Come, say you will go?'

Seeing that a frost had set in, to the probable stoppage of all hunting for some days, and that I had still a fortnight of my vacation before me, I said that I would do the obliging and stay for the ball. Only he wasn't to make a fool of himself.

'Don't you, that's all,' exclaimed the wildly grateful dragoon. 'But, I say, do any amount of flirting with all or any, only don't cut me out with Alice.'

'How am I to know which is Alice? They don't go about labelled, do they?'

'She's the younger. Besides she's—oh, so much the prettier!'

'Very well, then, if I——'

'Shut up now, will you?' said he, fetching me a tremendous blow in the back, in apprehension of my chaff.

We were late in reaching Grill on the night of the ball, and dancing had commenced. When Bob took me up to Mrs. Mason I felt convinced I must have seen that lady before, so familiar to me seemed her well-formed features and stately carriage. As Bob had predicted, she was very gracious and kept me in conversation until the conclusion of the dance in progress when we entered, when she offered to find me partners. And if there was manœuvring in it at all, it was very skillful, for she was careful to introduce me to three or four of the prettiest girls in the room, and only finished with her eldest niece.

Radiant from an unburdened heart although she was,

bright and beautiful as, say what you like, good fortune *will* make people, yet I knew her on the instant. The broad forehead, the good honest eyes, the sonsie face, I could not mistake; although there were jewels now in the fair hair, and every circumstance was so contrasted. And she knew me.

'Mr. Marston—Miss Guest—' Mr. Mason called his wife's attention from us, and so, perhaps fortunately, the surprise of recognition on Miss Guest's side, and the surprise and confusion on mine escaped her notice.

In a sort of desperation of embarrassment I asked for the next quadrille, and she, in equal bewilderment, assented. But as the minutes gave her a better comprehension, she clearly came quite to expect me to withdraw from the position. However I stood my ground doggedly, half resenting it, although she, of course, could only think me guilty of an unwarrantable breach of privilege. The impression on her mind would be that I had used my remarkable powers of invention and a sufficiently gentlemanly exterior to obtain admittance into society for which by condition I was not qualified. She, however, must submit to go through the dance with me, but she did so in a manner so cold and constrained as to show that she could be her father's daughter in spite of the sweetness of her disposition.

I took it most decidedly as a matter of course that I should be believed, but yet, as you can well think, it was so difficult a subject to approach that not for some minutes could I satisfy myself how to begin. 'Miss Guest,' I said, all possible solicitude in my voice, 'I am aware appearances are against me.' Certainly by her manner she showed no intention of contradicting me. 'I beg of you to suspend judgment until I have been heard in explanation.'

'Most decidedly some explanation is required,' she replied, looking haughtily down, and being at no pains to conceal her annoyance.

'If I may be allowed to take you to Mrs. Masons when this set is over, I am sure I can satisfy—you,' I was going to say, but substituted 'her.' She made no reply; I

could not tell whether I had at all shaken her in her bad impression of me.

'I assure you I have done nothing a gentleman might not do; I wish you could think I am speaking the truth. I had waited for a favorable interval in which to say it, growing more and more eager for what she might answer. She looked up at me quickly, with one of those sudden relentings, half-capricious and wholly sweet and kind.

'I can't quite know yet. I think you are.'

'Thank you,' I replied, warmly. 'I esteem myself already more than compensated for this momentary misconstruction.' Apparently she noticed nothing of my exceeding earnestness, looking straight before her with grave eyes and mouth.

I was not quite to escape a scene, however. Opposite us I saw Mr. Guest, regarding us with the greatest astonishment. To confirm himself he had to resort to his eye-glass, and upon what he saw, went hurriedly and with a face of extreme displeasure to where Mrs. Mason sat. I was fervently thankful as much for his sake as my own, to see that he had sufficient command over his indignation and disgust to reserve his accusation until he had drawn her from the crowded ball-room. The dance over, I was just going to suggest a search for him when he touched me on the arm and peremptorily desired a word with me.

'And if you will allow me,' he added, with freezing politeness, 'I should prefer to have Miss Guest under my own care.' Taking his daughter on his arm, he stalked out of the room, I following, half-angry; also, such is the force of attendant circumstances, with something of the air of a culprit. In a small room at the back was Mrs. Mason, looking—anything but 'proudly pleased.' 'Comfort yourself, my dear woman,' I thought; 'it *is* me. We'll soon have it right. And then—we'll see.' By Jove, though, it began hot, and I came out in a character in which I hardly knew myself; something new it was to hear patiently such words as were now addressed to me by Mr. Guest.

'So, sir, perhaps you will explain by what imposition you have contrived to obtain admission into Mrs. Mason's

house?' He was so arrogant, that really if it had been any one but Miss Guest's father I must have taken my revenge in chaffing him.

'I might well take offence at your tone, Mr. Guest——'

'I simply wish to know, before I ask you to relieve us of your presence, how you obtained admittance into my sister's house?'

'By the express invitation of Mrs. Mason herself,' I replied, as temperately as it was in human nature to reply to a question worded so insultingly. 'As a friend of Mr. Robert Stopford's, of whose family I am now a guest.'

'That is no answer at all. How am I to tell how and where you made Mr. Stopford's acquaintance? I have had a sample of your ingenuity before, Mr. Marston,—if that's really your name. It is my opinion you are nothing more than an adventurer, sir; a low adventurer.'

He was rapidly talking himself into a rage, and I confess to a considerable degree of heat in my own answer to this. I drew myself up with angry contempt.

'My name *is* Marston I beg to inform you—I am not in the habit of assuming false names. My father is a gentleman of standing in Leicestershire. With my uncle, Mr. Smith Pentland, I believe you are well acquainted. I was staying at his house when I made a call upon you, I admit in a rather singular character. But it was at Mr. Pentland's request, and solely because none of his people of business whom he could send on an affair so private were at liberty.'

'Ah! I quite understand you. You will hold no threats over me though. A gentleman need not to be ashamed to have been in difficulties, although it might be convenient at the time to keep it quiet. You won't threaten me.' I could not get a word of disclaimer in edgeways, so wrathful was he. 'It is more than ever my opinion that you are nothing but an adventurer. I saw something of your inventive powers then, remember!'

'There was no invention about it, Mr. Guest. I was, and am still, studying at Oxford.'

Miss Guest's face had been entreating her father this long while. 'I think Mr. Marston is to be believed, papa,' she half-timidly interposed.

'Frances, I am surprised you should have so little sense of propriety.'

Miss Guest, wincing under her father's severity, and reddening violently, made a minute study of her bouquet. I meant after this to exact a price for the affront put upon me, and so again recover my temper, and strove for a peaceful solution.

'With what *will* you be satisfied, Mr. Guest? With Mr. Stopford's word?'

'I don't vouch for all Mr. Robert Stopford's acquaintances.' Poor Bob! if he had only heard.

I make a gesture of impatience.

'Is there no one from your neighberhood here, Mr. Marston?' asked Mrs. Mason, who would be only too pleased to have me verified, and yet retain her caution. 'My brother is naturally desirous of proof; you need not take it as a personal matter. There is Lady Duncan Knox?'

'Lady Duncan? Oh, I am quite ready to be confronted with Lady Duncan Knox.' A little scornful I allowed myself to be, now that I saw my way out of the muddle. 'I'll go into the ball-room, if you please, and you separate yourself from me—it shall all be plain now—and call Lady Duncan's attention to me. I think you will be satisfied, Mr. Guest.

Of course the proof tendered was unimpeachable; and seeing me so confident, Mr. Guest cooled down with rather ludicrous rapidity, and indeed was altogether nonplussed. Like a great many people, who mostly find themselves in the end in a predicament because of it, he had determined, with or against reason, that a certain thing *was* to be. He had decided that I was an imposter; and now that it appeared more than doubtful he was not very comfortable.

'It is so difficult to know whom to believe,' he said, almost apologetically, as he led the way. Miss Guest, with Mrs. Mason, followed us at a short interval. I caught a side-glimpse of her, talking with, for her, unusual impetuosity, to her aunt. Once in the room the proceeding showed itself to Mr. Guest yet more equivocal.

'Really—we might, I think, dispense with any test,' said he, condescendingly.

'I prefer that Lady Duncan should be spoken to. I insist upon it, indeed.' I hadn't half done with Mr. Guest, you see. I might want him again.

At once more assured and more uncomfortable, he went across to my lady; I standing alone for some minutes, outwardly with an air of unconcern, inwardly with an absurd sense of being surveyed. Soon I became aware that Mr. Guest was guiding the lady through the crowd to where I stood.

'How do you do, Mr. Marston?' said she, coming up with extended hand, 'how do you do? Mr. Guest happened to mention your name, and I begged him to escort me to you. We are only just from Rome, and I am dying for home news. *Is* Mr. Norris going to stand for the county?'

Lady Duncan Knox was a merry voluble woman of five-and-thirty or so; very friendly with my mother, and a relative of my father besides.

'I don't think Mr. Norris will stand.'

'Then your father, perhaps?' said she, with immense interest.

'No, I think not. My father prefers his present seat for the borough.'

'And when shall I see my dear Mrs. Marston in town? Not before the House sits, I fear?'

'I suppose not; my mother is not fond of town, you know. They are arranging the sets, may I have the pleasure of this dance with your ladyship?'

'Me?—I'm engaged—five deep. Perhaps a later one.' And she moved away.

I looked hastily over my shoulder to where I knew Frances Guest was, and upon impulse she smiled back her pleasure. I was making towards her when her father detained me.

'Mr. Marston, I don't know how to frame my excuses to you for my rudeness. It is little atonement I can make except in the way of words.'

'None is needed, sir,' I answered, promptly; because, of course, I wasn't going to make it a quarrel now. And indeed he hadn't spoken badly. 'We are all liable to slight mistakes, Mr. Guest.'

'I can't forgive myself so easily; I am afraid I was too much annoyed to be just. We do hear of such deceptions nowadays, that really I took the alarm too quickly. It seems almost an insult after what has passed, but if at any time you are down at Southwich, and you like to call at Cullerton House, you will be sure of a welcome, and—you will do me a favor.'

I thanked him heartily, and proved my sincerity by escaping to Miss Guest as soon as politeness allowed. I found it would be late before she could give me a dance, but, half in pique, I stood out until my turn came.

'You are not dancing much to-night,' she said, as we took our places.

'Sometimes I like the other thing best.'

'I'm afraid,' said she, in a tone of vexation, 'it's because the evening has been made so disagreeable for you.'

'It's very good of you to distress yourself about me. But it has not been altogether disagreeable indeed.'

I could not help speaking significantly; somehow the tone had got into my voice, and I couldn't get it out.

'What you did, Mr. Marston, you did in kindness, too.'

'But I do take some blame to myself. You see, Miss Guest, it is not right for a man to put himself in a false position. At least—well—I don't know, I'm sure. I once argued it with my uncle, and we left off precisely where we began.'

'But you did it in the kindest way, and with the kindest intention.'

Well, you know, it becomes really pleasant to accuse one's self when one has so charming an advocate, self-enlisted. I said some foolish words of the sort. She blushed, but she had such a staid, demure way of listening to gallant speeches that really one was tempted on to words more and more meaning.

'I say, weren't you flirting last night, Marston?' said Bob next morning, striving to organize certain piecemeal recollections.

I put him off with some light speech, for you may be sure I should not make his confidence reciprocal. But I

don't mind admitting now that I left the Mason's ball with a very gravely-damaged anatomy. I must have been hit deeply, for the frost broke up, and I still preferred Sussex for the remainder of the vacation. However, it is reassuring to know that I could take interest in the furtherance and enjoyment of the different social courtesies between Hetton and Grill Hall. Nor was this all. On the next occasion of seeing Mr. Smith Pentland I expressed such pleasant remembrances of my last autumn's visit that he invited me to repeat it in the coming one. But I am almost ashamed to say that, once at Southwich, I still more adroitly contrived to be invited on to Cullerton itself. For the partridge-shooting, my host said—my own object I did not talk much about then.

You won't say I sped badly, though, when I tell you that the Christmas saw me at Grill Hall, the accepted and approved suitor of sweet, dear Frances Guest; and so ended my "Delicate Mission."

Every one had listened attentively to the narrator, and as he concluded, the interest in the circle of story-tellers was not permitted to flag, but was instantly resumed by our friend the American, who consented to favor the company with a story of adventure in the Far West.

CHAPTER IV.

THE AMERICAN'S STORY—A ROCKY MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE.

"About six years ago—no, I think it must be nearer seven—I was with a party of friends hunting in the Rocky Mountains. There were eight of us in all; but I needn't tell you all their names. One of them, however, I may mention particularly; he was a tall, good-looking young Englishman, as frank and generous a fellow as I have ever met. He must have been about twenty-four, I should say. Well, we were very good friends in no time, and became quite confidential as we sat over the camp fire of an even-

ing. We shared the same tent; so, not unnaturally, in the six weeks that we camped out in those wild regions, I heard all about his relations and friends in England. He was to be married to a certain young lady, who possessed, according to him, all the cardinal virtues, and beauty as well; but whose father, considering Charley (did I say his name —Charley Ebsworth) a rather changeable young man—which he really was in some respects—and the girl too young, had decreed that he should not see her for a year. If, at the end of that time, they had neither of them altered their minds, he wouldn't stand in the way.

"Well, we had very bad sport, and for ever so long never had a glimpse of a bear, until one day Ebsworth and I determined to go out alone and try our luck, which promised more fun if we did succeed in stalking one, as there was a spice of danger about it. We provided ourselves with some dry biscuits, and each put a whisky flask in his pocket, loaded our guns, and examined our knives, to see that they were in trim and to be depended on. Thus prepared for an encounter with a grizzly, we set off early one fine, cold, brisk morning, determined not to return without something to show, if we could help it.

"Our camp was fixed on the side of a mountain; at the bottom of the valley ran a river, smooth and untroubled, while above were the steep, rocky sides, covered with pine trees in places, though here and there showing rugged and barren of verdure. The dark tops of the pine trees stood out in strong relief against the sky, while on the other side of us peak after peak raised itself to touch the clouds. We climbed upward, and were soon threading our way among the trees. We walked for a long way, sometimes climbing up, sometimes descending, without seeing a sign of game. After a time we came to where the river had hewn itself a path out of the rock, and rushed turbulently between steep, smooth walls, surmounted by trees whose roots were often exposed to view where the water had washed the soil away when swollen during the rainy season. Several times we came upon Indians, in their birch canoes, shooting the rapids, with feather head-dresses and

bright-colored garments, their dark faces animated with the excitement as they steered their way along the black rocks that showed in places surrounded by white foam. I suppose there isn't much danger really to them, as they are so used to it; but an inexperienced man would certainly be dashed to pieces in less than a minute if he were to venture down those boiling curves.

"At last we came upon sheep tracks, and, following them for a little distance, we were soon rejoiced with the sight of four mountain sheep feeding, some six hundred yards off. We crept up very cautiously, till near enough to get a good shot, and fired simultaneously. One fell. The other three galloped off, apparently unhurt. I fired my other barrel after them, but without effect.

"The sheep we found quite dead. Charley had a great objection to skinning and cutting it up, so I performed that operation, and hung the quarters on the branch of a tree, out of the reach of bears, should any come that way. Then we went on some miles further, without seeing a sign of a bear or of game of any kind; and at last we thought it best to turn back, or we might not be able to reach the camp before nightfall. When we had nearly arrived at the place where we had shot the sheep, Ebsworth seized me by the arm.

"'Look there!' he whispered, excitedly; 'straight before you. Do you see?'

"And there, sure enough, under a tree some distance ahead, was a huge bear, patting something on the ground—what, we could not see.

"'We had better get up trees,' I began.

"But before the words were well out of my mouth he fired, and his shot was followed by a yell of rage from the great brute, which raised itself on its hind legs, and looked round to see who were its assailants. Then, apparently catching sight of us, it came toward us full pelt.

"'Up a tree, Charley, quick!' I shouted; and we darted off in different directions.

"But in a minute I became aware that the nearest tree was a hundred yards off, and that the beast would be on

me before I could get to it. I turned round, took a hasty aim and fired, but with no other effect than that of lessening the distance between us by stopping. I saw then that my only chance lay in the hope of checking his advance with the other barrel, and fired again. But this second shot took no effect, and I had but just time to pull out my knife when he was upon me. I can now recall the sensation exactly—the horrid feeling of being clasped in his embrace, of his hot breath upon me, and his fur stifling me. I struck at him with my knife, and finally buried it in his side before I lost consciousness.

"When I opened my eyes, it was to find Charley Ebsworth supporting me, pale as death, and administering whisky neat, with a very anxious expression of countenance.

"'Are you better?' he asked. 'I really thought the beast had done for you.'

"'So did I.'

"And I sat up and felt myself, to see if any bones were broken. I felt rather faint, and was considerably bruised, but that was all the harm done.

"'What a narrow escape!' I exclaimed. 'By Jove, Charley, that was near. Where is it?'

"'Behind you,' was the answer.

"And sure enough there it lay, quite dead.

"'How did you manage it?' was naturally my next question.

"'Why, I came up behind and struck at him, when he dropped you and turned on me. And then we had a bit of a tussle; but you had wounded him considerably already, so I disposed of him without much difficulty.'

"'And are you not hurt at all?' I asked.

"He held out his arm, which he had bound up with his handkerchief.

"'I did get clawed slightly there, that's all. Now you stop here while I fetch some water for you and wash my arm. I shan't be many minutes, for I can hear the river now, so it can't be far off.'

"I got on to my feet, meaning to go with him, but felt

too sick and giddy, so had to sit down again and watch him disappear among the trees.

"'I shall have to walk fast, if we mean to get back to camp to-night,' I thought, as I sat waiting.

"The minutes slipped by, and at last I grew tired of sitting still, and, rising to my feet again, staggered about a bit, to get rid of the giddiness; and after a little of the whisky, which I had in my pocket, felt ever so much better. Charley's flask lay on the ground, where he had laid it when giving me some out of the little metal cup that fitted on to the bottom, and I picked it up to put in my pooket, for fear it might be forgotten.

"'What a long time he is!' I thought, after a while. 'I had better go and look after him!'

"So I set off in the direction I had seen him take, and halloa'd to him, but received no response. Certainly it was the way he had gone, because I had noticed him pass that fallen tree, and sure enough the sound of water was nearer already. It could not be far off, and I walked on, and was soon greeted with a sight of the river, rushing along a gorge, fifty feet below me. It was a perfectly perpendicular wall of rock on the top of which I stood. I saw at once that, as he could not get down there, he must have turned either to the left or the right to find some means of descending to the water. To the left, evidently, it would be no use to go, as the cliff became every moment more steep; but to the right it descended, and so that way I turned. I shouted again, and called 'Charley' at the top of my voice; but there was no answer. After walking some little distance, I came to a place where it was possible to climb down, and was soon having a deep refreshing draught; but though I looked up and down the stream, there was not a sign of him I sought. Receiving no reply to my repeated shouting and whistling, I decided that I must have missed him, and that he had returned to the place where he had left me. So, painfully and slowly, I clambered up where I had descended, and set off to find my way back again.

"I walked along the edge of the cliff again, till I came to

where I had first looked over, and, lying down on my face, for I was still giddy, I looked over the side again, down at the rushing water. Could he have fallen over the edge? The horrible thought would present itself to me; and if he had, he must certainly have been dashed to pieces on the rocks below. Turning sick at the mere idea of such a thing, I went back to the place where the bear was lying, hoping to find him there waiting for me; but no, he was not there, nor was there anything to show that he had been there and gone again. I wandered about, and whistled and halloa'd again till I was hoarse, when I came to the conclusion that he must have lost himself, and would most probably endeavour to find his way back to the camp, which I had better do as well. The worst of it was that he had with him neither gun, knife, nor whisky flask, having left all these lying on the ground by me.

"I went back, picked up my gun and his too, stuck both knives into my belt, and set off. The sun was now on the point of setting, so long a time had been spent in the fight with the bear, and in Ebsworth's disappearance and my search for him. I soon became aware that it would be dark before I could be a quarter of the way back.

"I walked for some distance, and then stopped and hesitated. I could not feel sure that I was going the right way. It was getting dusk, too; so there was nothing for it but to get up the most suitable tree I could find and wait for the morning. I was so tired that I managed to sleep in spite of the discomforts of my position; for a tree is not a convenient place to sleep in, especially if you haven't a blanket or anything to roll yourself up in. It was extremely cold, too, but a little pull from my flask kept me from feeling that so much.

"In the morning I descended and looked about me. I had not the least idea where I was; but a little reflection told me that if I looked toward the north the river must be to my right hand, and by following the river I must reach the camp in time. I had wandered away from the water the evening before, and it was, in consequence, some time before I reached it again. However, before the sun set

again, the welcome sight of the camp greeted me; and hungry, faint, and thoroughly worn out, I presented myself among the party. They had sent out in search of us—two in one direction, two in another—and were as much horrified to see me return without Charley Ebsworth as I was to find he was not in camp.

"The next day we left one man in charge of the camp, and the rest of us rode off together to look for him. When we came to the tree on which we had hung the mutton, I was surprised to find it was not there—a fact which I had not noticed on the previous evening, never having thought about it then. However, a little farther on we came to the skin, carefully patted into the ground, when I remembered that, when we first caught sight of the bear, it was patting something into the earth; and one of the party, who understood the habits of the grizzly, set to work to dig up the earth, and there, a little way down, were the four quarters of my sheep. Not far from this lay the carcase of the bear; but we were too anxious about Charley to stop for the skin, and continued our search.

"At night we all met together in camp again, weary and dispirited after our fruitless quest. For the two or three succeeding days we scoured the country again, each time taking a wider range; but it was all in vain. We assembled in camp each night, feeling the case more hopeless, but dreading to say that it must be given up. There seemed to be no way but one of accounting for his extraordinary disappearance, and that was that he had fallen over the cliff, and been dashed on the rocks, when his body would be washed away by the current.

"At last we had to confess that further search was useless, and that we must give up and turn southward, all the pleasure of our excursion being spoiled by this melancholy ending. We were soon in civilized regions again, and separated to go our different ways. I felt that I ought to write to Charley's friends; but as I had never heard the names or address of any of them, it was impossible to do so.

"After that I spent three years in the Eastern States, and then came to England, and it was here that, by a most extraordinary coincidence—well, that is putting the end first. Let me see: it was four years after the adventure in the Rocky Mountains that I was going on a long railway journey by night, two or three days before Christmas.

"My fellow-passengers were a little, short, stout, jolly man, very talkative and good-tempered; a rather grave, quiet individual, who was a lawyer, I think he told us; and a man so wrapped up, and with his hat so much down over his eyes, that we could not see what he was like.

"It was just such a night as this; but we made ourselves very comfortable, and got talking about many things very pleasantly, except the muffled-up man in the corner, who did not speak a word. We were all going a long distance, which made us the more chatty, as we should have to pass some time together.

"The lawyer informed us that he was going to fetch his sister from the north of England, to spend Christmas with him in London. The little fat man and I were both going to spend the next week with friends in Scotland.

"'And are you, sir, on your way to pass Christmas with your friends?' asked the lawyer, making an endeavor to draw the gentleman in the corner into the conversation.

"'No,' he answered, abruptly and sharply; 'I have no friends to pass it with.'

"His voice made me start violently.

"'Charley'! I exclaimed, involuntarily.

"He looked up then for the first time, and his eyes met mine—the same clear, dark gray eyes. There was no doubt about it; it was Charley Ebsworth.

"I started up, and, going to that end of the carriage, sat down opposite to him.

"'Charley, is it really you? Alive and well? Thank Heaven! But why did you not speak to me before?' I asked, as we exchanged a warm clasp of the hand. 'Did you not know me?'

"'I knew you directly you entered the carriage,' he answered.

"'Then why did you not speak?'

"He did not answer. The lawyer and the little stout man, after looking at us for a minute in mute astonishment, had, with true gentlemanly instinct, moved close up to the other window, and entered into conversation.

"'What became of you when you left me on the mountain?' I asked.

"'I fell over the cliff,' he answered. 'My arm, you know, was torn open, and I turned giddy and lost my balance. The water was deep where I fell, and I came to the top, and was carried along a little way, till I managed to climb to a rock and climb on to it. Then I was picked off by an Indian in a canoe.'

"'And then why did you not come back to the camp?' I asked.

"'The Indian kept me prisoner for six long months before I managed to get away, when I returned home as quickly as I could.'

"His tone was so melancholy that I did not like to question him further, but merely pressed his hand and looked at him inquiringly.

"'She was married,' he said, in a low tone, and averted his face.

"Well, that is all. I have only seen him three times since. He is not at all the same fellow that I knew in the States; he is cynical and reserved, and is married now to a woman older than himself, with a lot of money."

It was past the hour of two when Stanton Bell finished his story and the storm still beat wildly against the windows of their temporary prison. So the fire having been rebuilt Basil Wilton, who sat next in order, asked if the company cared to hear a nautical ghost story. All were unanimous in the affirmative and Basil started thus:

CHAPTER V.

BASIL WILTON'S STORY—THE GHOST ON THE NORTH ATLANTIC.

It was on a bright sunny afternoon in June that I stood on Pier 20, North River, New York, a passenger by the Anchor line steamer, "Cimbria," bound for Glasgow. The "Cimbria" was a fine vessel; of nearly two thousand tons' burden, and commanded by a genial Scotchman in the person of Capt. McRae. She was chiefly engaged in the Mediterranean trade, and many a fine cargo of Messina oranges and Malaga grapes, to say nothing of currants from the Greek archipelago and pressed figs from Constantinople, found their way into Gotham in the good ship, "Cimbria."

There were but few passengers, for the tide of travel had scarcely as yet fairly set eastward for the season, so that the usual shyness apparent amongst a number of people gathered for the first time around the same table, soon wore away, and we had scarcely lost sight of Sandy Hook before we were all on excellent terms with each other. Let me, in a few words, endeavor to describe my fellow passengers. First and foremost was a Mr. Mallet, a gentleman, about thirty-four, tall and slight, with clear complexion, light eyes, and auburn hair and beard—poor fellow, his voyaging soon afterwards ended for ever.—He had spent the Winter in Southern Europe, in order to propitiate a weak and broken-down constitution, but, although he had thus escaped the chilling blasts of an English Winter, the improvement was but a temporary one, and, in spite of a cheerful, almost gay, exterior, nature was rapidly succumbing to the strain placed upon her.

Poor Tom Mallet—peace to his ashes in the old churchyard at Marston, for a truer heart never beat, as I often proved in after years. Next in order was a Mrs. Thelwell, a grass-widow, from Albany, who intended passing the Summer in Paris, so as to "bring out" her only daughter, a bright-eyed brunette of eighteen or

thereabouts. Both mother and daughter looked forward with delight to a sojourn in the gay Capital, and were never tired of discoursing on the subject of Paris fashions in dress and millinery, and other kindred topics on which the fair sex love to dilate. Being the only ladies on board they enjoyed a complete monopoly of the gentlemen's society, which did not, of course, detract in any way, from their enjoyment of the trip across. The cabin circle was completed in the persons of Mr. Thomas Bolton, the owner of a large and profitable saw-mill in Georgia, and a native of England, who was revisiting the old country for the first time, after an absence of nearly twenty-six years. With him was his eldest son, a young fellow of seventeen whose "fast" demeanor contrasted very strongly with the sober style and quaint aspect of his worthy *père*. This young gentleman at first made ardent advances on Miss Thelwell, until as promptly repelled by that prudent young lady, who anticipated the accomplishment of higher conquests in "la belle France." For the first three or four days nothing occurred to vary the monotony of the voyage with the exception of an occasional shoal of porpoise or a passing sail, but as both are *stock incidents* on the Atlantic, I need not dwell on them with any degree of particularity. On the sixth day out a cry rang from end to end of the steamer, "a waterspout," a waterspout, and we had an opportunity of studying one of the strangest forms of natural phenomena the sea affords. Imagine a vast pillar of water, wide at the base which rests in the ocean, and gradually narrows to a peak as it touches the clouds, whilst it has a sort of a swift gyrating motion under the influence of contending winds. The one in question continued to move swiftly forward and remained in sight for some twenty minutes, when it burst with a loud and resonant report.

Our evenings were generally occupied in playing cards—a rubber of whist or a round game of "speculation," the "pool" always finding its way into the box devoted to the interests of the Royal Lifeboat Institution; and on the night in question we had had a more than usually lively

time, and the gaily-decorated and handsome saloon rang with merry laughter. The intervals between the port-lights were filled by a series of oval frescoes representing different towns and cities in Italy, and this led to a discussion on their relative claims on the attention of the tourist. In the midst of the discussion (which is, of course, irrelevant to my story, and only introduced as a species of data to the sequel) a steward appeared at the saloon entrance with the captain's compliments begging the attendance of Mr. Mallett and Mr. Wilton on deck, as there was a beautiful exhibition of the aurora. Three springs carried us up the companion-way, and on emerging we found Capt. McRae standing by the taffrail. It was a magnificent sight with a clear full moon —such a one as is but rarely experienced except at sea—and the whole steamer was bathed in a flood of cold, white light. The sea around was irradiated by the presence of shoals of Mollusca, or jelly-fish, whose phosphorescent tints, appeared in a constant change of coloring as the waves dashed against the counter. Far away on the northern horizon the clearly defined rays of the Aurora were sharply thrown forward in an almost perfect bow. Indeed and truth it was a glorious *tout ensemble*, and for a time held us all spell-bound by its almost magnetic attraction. To summon the ladies was our first thought, and having carefully donned a series of becoming wraps they joined us on deck under the escort of the two remaining gentlemen of the party. And now comes the point of my story;—I have said that we were standing at the taffrail, a little at one side of the wheel-house. In the latter were the quartermaster and two men attached to the watch, besides these and the seaman pacing in front of the binnacle, the quarter-deck was entirely deserted save by our party who were loud—particularly the ladies—in their expressions of delight and amazement. Everyone had something to add to the general fund of anecdote that floated round relative to minor experiences of asimilar character in Nice,—on the Calabrian coast, or in sunny Florida. Then the deep basso of the captain's voice joins in, and we are held spell-bound by the recital of some wild tale of ocean peril and hair-breadth escape.

In the midst of all this we are electrified by a cry, bearing an unmistakeable approach to a human one, and yet so weird and unearthly as to chill the very blood in our veins. The Captain was the first to recover his self-possession—in fact it had never deserted him—and his earliest impulse was to challenge the watch and demand the cause of the strange cry. Before he could gain a response the same sound came wailing on the stillness—this time apparently nearer than ever. Again was the demand loudly and sternly repeated—what do you want? and this time sharp and clear came the response from the binacle—"I didn't speak, sir?" Pass the word forward to the bridge and ask the officer of the watch who shouted,—and back from the bridge came the unsatisfactory reply, "No one!" By this time a considerable amount of trepidation had seized upon the fair widow and her daughter, whilst the other members of the party endeavored to assume an amount of ease but little felt. For myself I am free to confess the presence of a slight tingling at the roots of my hair which speedily communicated kindred sensations to other portions of my frame. In the midst of a council of war which threw not the slightest light upon the cause of the strange disturbance the same weird, terrible cry, twice repeated, came apparently almost from under our very feet. To rush to the side was but the work of a moment, and there level with the water lay an upturned human face, ghastly white, with lurid piercing eyes and moving lips, from which no sound seemed to come. It was a terrible sight; enough to make the stoutest heart quail and grow faint. At every dip of the steamer, the head dipped too, but always in one never-changing position, whilst the long, dark hair floated backward on the tide. Overcome by the spectral appearance, the fair widow fainted in the too willing arms of the Georgian sawyer, whilst her daughter clung to his hitherto despised offspring for moral and physical support. The only unmoved member of the party was our commander, who maintained his usual cool demeanor, as if the work of encountering ghostly heads on mid-ocean were but part and parcel of his professional career.

Issuing his orders with customary promptitude, the steamer was speedily brought to; but by this time the head had disappeared and was seen no more, and so ended "My strange adventure on the North Atlantic." Of the rest of the voyage I need say nothing, suffice it to say that in spite of untoward prognostication the remainder of our trip to the Clyde was both comfortable and rapid, and five days after saw us abreast of Greenock.

I would add that the matter-of-fact Quartermaster—a staunch Presbyterian—privately expressed to me his belief that the whole thing might be traced to natural causes, and was beginning to talk of large ports and inquisitive stewards, when I lost all patience, and very properly scouted such ideas, as any sensible man would have done.

> There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

During the concluding sentences of Basil's story the lightkeeper was observed to move uneasily in his chair, and when silence again ensued, giving a hitch to his seaman's trousers, he preferred the request that he might be allowed to relate a rather thrilling adventure of which in past years he had been the subject. Permission being readily accorded, Forbes thus began:

CHAPTER VI.

THE LIGHT-KEEPER'S STORY—"THE CORPSE-GLEAM."

Some three and twenty years ago I was assistant lightkeeper at Rymore, on the Upton Sands. It was a wild, dreary spot, some four miles from the Lancashire coast, and my only visitors were an occasional fisherman and the regular monthly supply boat belonging to the Trinity House Commissioners. I should not have minded its lonely character but unfortunately the place bore a bad name, and many a weird story found its way into the village tap-rooms in connection with the Rymore light. Although these tales all differed in their style of

narration, still they were substantially alike in the main and all referred to the presence of an unearthly light which from time to time made its appearance on the Sands and was always the precursor of disaster. The story generally took something of the following form: "Years ago, before the coast was much peopled, it was the custom of the few travellers who had occasion to cross the Estuary which flowed between a break in the coast to do so on horseback—when the tide was out—as it saved a wide detour. One rough winter's eve a solitary traveller had nearly reached the opposite shore when suddenly, to his amazement, a vivid bright light appeared to spring up almost under his horse's feet and then as suddenly to vanish as it were into the earth. Almost at the same moment a pitiful, unearthly yell broke the silence of the hour, and then all was again still. His horse, usually a quiet and docile animal, grew so unmanageable as to almost throw his rider who was obliged to dismount and finally to relinquish his hold on the bridle-rein. The horse, wild with terror, galloped furiously away and the traveller essayed to reach the shore on foot. He had not, however, proceeded far before he stumbled across a body of some kind, and, on closer examination, it turned out to be the corpse of a beautiful girl. In her side was a ghastly wound and her white dress was covered with crimson blood stains. Half dead with cold and sick with terror the traveller bore the light, delicate frame, to the nearest house, where it was laid on the only bed the cottage afforded. That night a fearful storm burst upon the low-lying coast, and in the midst of it a large outward-bound Indiaman ran upon the Sands, and out of a large crew and a number of passengers only one man was saved and borne insensible into the very cottage where the murdered girl lay. When he in a measure recovered, the story was told him, and he was taken to see the corpse. Imagine the horror of the bystanders when, on catching a sight of the uncovered face, he uttered a terrible shriek and fell down senseless. On recovering, he confessed that the corpse was that of his young wife whom he had brutally murdered on board in a fit

of rage and jealousy, and cast overboard, and whom inscrutable Providence had seen fit thus to avenge. The self-convicted murderer paid the penalty of his crime, and from that hour it is said that the Sands of Upton are haunted by the spirit of the murdered girl, which seems to rise from the shoal and go circling round, echoing and wailing as one in mortal agony." Be this as it may, certain it is that on several occasions farmers and villagers returning late from market brought home wonderful stories of strange sights and sounds they had encountered on the lonely expanse of sand and shingle.

Men of our calling are, as a rule, of an eminently practical turn of mind, with but little leaning towards the ghostly or marvelous, so I paid but a passing attention to these spectral stories until one cold January night I received a lesson I shall never forget. I had seen the lamps filled and trimmed, a duty which always pertains to the light-keeper's assistant, and was quietly seated at my lonely supper, for my mate had gone off in a fishing boat in order to procure some few necessaries on shore—I should say that our light was erected on the westermost edge of the Sands, and commanded a view over the whole.—Whilst at supper busily engaged in thinking out a somewhat difficult problem in connection with my duty, a shrill, long protracted and horrible cry burst upon my ear. To seize my lamp, unbar the door, and hurry forth, was the work of an instant, and as I stood on the outer platform of the Lighthouse my eye strove to pierce the barrier of darkness all around. As I vainly strained my vision the same piteous wail came borne on the night air, and almost at the same moment a twinkling, moving light, sped rapidly across the Sands in the direction of the Lighthouse. I am not ashamed to say that I stood as though spell-bound and for a time helpless. But the force of discipline soon asserted itself, and in a moment I was cool and collected. I am not sure that at the time I had any settled programme of action, and even if I had, the quick succession of after occurrences must have driven it clean out of my head. All that I can remember with any degree of clearness is the

following:—On first sighting the light it moved with a uniformly gliding motion, which rapidly increased as it neared the Lighthouse, whilst it seemed at the same time to gain in brilliancy. I have already intimated that the night was intensely dark, so that it was utterly impossible to distinguish an object a yard or two in front. Still the light sped on nearer and nearer until it rested within a hundred paces of where I stood. All the terrible tales I had heard of the fateful "Corpse Gleam" came crowding into my mind with added terrors, but discipline had triumphed over nature, and I was cool and calm. I knew very well that, whatever happened, I could only rely on my own resources, for aid as my companion would not be likely to return before early morning, perhaps later. So I stood still with a beating heart and listened. With the exception of the sough of the sea all was still as the grave, and I had begun to think that my eyes were playing me false when I thought I detected a slight movement underneath the gallery on which I stood. As you may see, gentlemen, by a glance around, we are pretty well supplied with weapons of defence—a by no means useless precaution in so lonely and isolated a position. On the occasion of which I am speaking I was armed with a brace of pistols and a short seaman's cutlass, and on sighting the moving object my hand wandered to my belt; but before I could draw either sword or pistols a dark form confronted me.—I felt a heavy blow, and then all was a blank. When I recovered I found myself lying on my pallet-bed, and my mate, Jem Walton, was bending anxiously over me. My first thoughts in the dim return of consciousness were devoted to the lights, and I eagerly inquired if they were all right. "Thee bide a bit, lad," said Jem in his quaint North country dialect, "and I will tell thee all. Meantime take a sup of this broth and then get thee to sleep a wee." But he might have spared his kindly though rough advice, for I had again fainted; and then followed days of delirium, in which I raved of "corpse lights," and murdered women until it required all Jem's strength to keep me in bed. Our good doctor

here, who was at that time living on the coast, and had been hastily summoned by signal, paid me every attention, and by the aid of Providence and a good constitution, I gradually pulled through, and grew strong enough to listen to Jem's story of my sudden mishap. For a long period previously the coast had been infested by a vile crew of wreckers who made it their business, by means of false lights and signals to endeavor to entice ships on shore. The bad odor possessed by the Sands gave them a great advantage, and they endeavored in every way to increase it by working on the nervous fancies of the simple country-folk. It seems they gleaned a knowledge of Jem's visit on shore, and had conceived the audacious project of capturing the Lighthouse and extinguishing the lights, trusting to the continuance of the storm to prevent Jem's return. Stealthily mounting the step-ladder they had managed to surprise me by a dangerous blow on the head, and were proceeding to extinguish the lamps when the sudden and unexpected return of my companion, in company with four stout fishermen completely changed the aspect of affairs, and put the scoundrels to flight. Shortly afterwards they were all hunted down and captured, and during the rest of my residence on the Upton Sands, I never heard that any one was again troubled by the presence of the "Corpse Gleam."

Doctor Cuming, who was naturally a little embarrassed at the kindly references made to him in Forbes' tale, broke the silence that followed by saying, that if his friends deemed that any incident in the generally wonderful life of a village surgeon might not prove unacceptable, he would gladly take his turn in the story-telling circle, by giving a rather unpleasant experience that once fell to his lot. But we must devote a fresh chapter to the Doctor's story.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DOCTOR'S STORY.—"MURDER WILL OUT."

It is now more than five and twenty years since I first began to practice in a small out of the way village called Tarrant Stanmore. It was a wild and rough place enough. So wild that in my frequent visits to my scattered patients I frequently lost my way, and in so doing met with several queer adventures; although all these were eclipsed by the story I am about to relate. The village itself was situated on a wide bare moor which extended for miles on every side, and the nearest habitation was an old dilapidated Inn some two miles and a half eastward. It so happened on the first Christmas-Eve after my settlement in Tarrant Stanmore or Stanmore, as it was usually called, I had occasion to call on a patient who occupied one of a small cluster of cottages some nine miles beyond the Inn—a distance altogether, as I have already said of something less than twelve miles. It was a fine day, and the snow lay crisp and bright in the sunlight. There was no need for haste, as we were by no means busy, so I determined to walk. I was young and active then, and I seldom lost the opportunity of walking, for by so doing I gained a better knowledge of the country, as well as an increment of health from the exercise.

The journey to the village was a long one for poor people, so we kept a small stock of medical necessaries at the place of which I have spoken, under the guardianship of one of the cottagers, and I took several small articles I remembered we required there, among them a little phial of a strong solution of nitrate of silver, to be diluted hereafter and used for certain diseases of the eye.

Bear in mind that little phial of nitrate of silver, for, under Providence, it brought a murderer to the gallows.

I set off briskly for my twelve mile walk about noon. On my road over the moor I passed the Cottage Inn; the sign was legible then, and it told how John Galt provided good entertainment for man and beast—the house looking far more suited to travellers of the latter species than the

former. It looked, indeed, nearly as woe-begone then as it does now, and as if few wayfarers cared to accept Mr. John Galt's offer. This was the case, I learned afterward; for the house had a bad name, though I had been too short a time in the neighborhood to hear of it. How far that reputation was deserved you shall presently judge. In the meantime, picture me striding bravely up the hill, now and then having to make a detour upon the moor to avoid an unusually formidable snowdrift. I reached Herneford all right —for so the cluster of cottages which was my destination was named, after a local spirit supposed to haunt the woods— and on arriving there I found more work to do than I expected. There was, moreover, a young woman, who, with a consideration for her medical man not often shown by her sex in such cases, took the opportunity of presenting her husband with another baby, and so saved me a special journey. All this made me very late, and had there been any accommodation in Herneford I might have been tempted to stay. As it was, I made up my mind for the walk, trusting in Providence. But before I went, I looked carefully over our small surgery, which was in an attic room in the cottage, and regarded with superstitious reverence by the inhabitants. These may seem trivial details, but, as you will see, they are essential to my story. At the surgery, amongst others, I did three things: 1. I found more of the nitrate of silver solution than I expected, so I merely filled up the small bottle and replaced the little phial in its case. 2. I had entertained some suspicion of the goodness of a certain acid supplied us, and finding an old bottle of it on an obscure shelf, I put it in my pocket to take home and test the strength. 3. I found the ring of the large brass syringe we kept there was broken; the syringe worked perfectly well, but the ring should be mended, and I pocketed it also for that purpose. I need mention nothing else—the silver solution, the acid, and the syringe are all the details with which I need trouble you.

I started off at a brisk pace, and even as I did so, I could feel the wind rising; and I had not gone above a hundred yards or so when I felt a flake of snow fall on my face.

That ought to have warned me; but I was somewhat stubborn and self-willed, and I determined at all hazards to persevere. Night fell, but neither moon nor friendly stars shone out, and presently I found myself in the midst of a heavy snow-storm. For some time I managed to keep to the track—at least, so I imagined; but at length I became conscious that I had lost it, though I flattered myself that I was blundering on in the right direction. For a little time the snow-storm seemed to slacken; at all events, I was able to make some progress. After a short time I felt myself getting drowsy; but I knew it would be death to stop; and then again the flakes came down heavier than ever, and I could hardly make headway at all against the driving wind and drifting snow. I was plodding feebly on, when suddenly, above the noise of the storm, I heard a sound that, cold as I was, seemed to chill me through and through. It was a wild, loud scream—a man's, I concluded; for it was strangely strong and hoarse, and it continued until suddenly it was broken off sharply, and I heard no more. Something had stopped it, or, I argued, a turn of the wind might have suddenly swept the sound away from me.

It was sufficiently appalling, and on first hearing it I started violently and dropped my stick, which, in the thick snow, I was unable to find. What terrible scene was being enacted on that wild moor on such a night? What criminal was trusting to the white snow to hide his crime? I nerved myself for an effort, and struggled on wildly for what seemed a long time; and at last I came against a door half covered with the drifted snow, and almost at the same moment my foot struck against something in the snow, and stooping down, I picked up, to my intense astonishment, the stick I had dropped an hour ago. Close to the door was a narrow window, through which I could see a faint light, and in an instant I recognized three terrible facts connected with my situation.

In the first place, I had walked for hours, and had only covered the two miles which separated John Galt's from Herneford. I knew it was the house, for I could feel the

sign above the low door. In the second place, I had passed close to it an hour or more ago, as my stick proved, and therefore must be wandering in a circle. In the third place—and this fact was the most terrible—the awful scream I had heard *must*, humanly speaking, have come from some one inside the lonely inn.

But whatever might have happened, I must have shelter, for I could not have struggled a yard farther; so I knocked loudly at the door, and after some delay it was opened.

The man who let me in—I can say now it was John Galt—was most anxious, apparently, I should not see his face. He had a large comforter round the lower part of it; and a hat slouched over the forehead; while the horn-lantern he carried gave out a dim, uncertain light.

"What d'you want?" he said, in a hoarse voice.

I would have given a great deal to have been able to turn away; but better the possible dangers inside the house than the merciless storm without, so I answered:

"A night's lodging. I can get no farther in this snow."

The man hesitated a good deal; certainly an innkeeper, this, who did not care much for custom; and at last he said gruffly:

"Come in."

With a shiver that was not owing to the cold, I crossed the threshold, and found myself in a low room, very roughly and scantily furnished, with a doorway in a corner leading out of it to the upper story. I could see also by the dim light a few rough shelves, with some bottles and pewter pots upon them. Still keeping his face as much as possible in shadow, but still, I could see, intently watching me, he took down a bottle and a wineglass, and then saying brusquely, "This road; I sleep here," led the way up stairs. As he strode up, he said, as if an afterthought, "And there's no one else in the house"—pleasant news from such a man. I followed him, and was shown into a small room containing a bed, a chair, and a table, and a small press near the door. Galt put the lantern on the table, filled out a wineglass of the liquor, and saying "Whisky," handed it to me. Strange to say, he retained

the bottle, which at once aroused my suspicions; so I drank, and then only nodded. He gruffiy said "Good-night," and strode out of the room. The moment his back was turned I discharged the whisky, which I had retained in my mouth, into the basin; at all events, I thought, I would not be drugged.

Two things were very noticeable: his anxiety not to be seen himself, and his evident desire to watch me that I should see nothing more of the house than he chose to show me—should not take a step into any room or passage other than those through which he led me. He succeeded in both, for I never, even when he offered me the whisky, had a fair look at his face; and, at the same time, I felt that he watched me narrowly.

I felt very sleepy from cold and exposure; but I had made up my mind that I must not go to sleep, or my life would be in danger. I felt that as I stepped over the threshold, and it increased upon me every moment; a conclusion arrived at on insufficient premises, you will say, but, nevertheless, one that I never staid to argue with myself; a conclusion jnstified, too, after these discoveries.

After putting out the whisky, which, as I anticipated, smelt strongly of opium, I tried to fasten the door, but found no lock or means of doing so—merely a latch. This was not reassuring; and I made another discovery shortly which alarmed me still more. The table, I found, formed part of the bed. The chair, as it seemed at first, was a seat imitating one let into the wall, into which also the press was fastened. There was nothing to drag against the door, and nothing to turn into an offensive weapon; for there was neither fender or fire-irons, and the wash-bowl was tin and very small. I was caught in a death-trap, and, scarcely dared to breathe a prayer that I might get out of it safely, so impossible did it seem. For some time I was stunned; and if Galt had come up then I should have been an easy victim. I seemed in imagination to die, and the shock nearly deprived me of my senses.

But I kept awake, and gradually got accustomed to the situation, awful as it was. I seemed resigned to the strug-

gle which I felt must come sooner or later, and my mind began to wander vaguely round the subject. I can recall my thoughts now; but I hardly know in what order they succeeded each other then.

Galt would be sure to be armed; moreover, he had evidently the strength of a giant, and I was by no means strong, and had nothing whatever with which to defend myself except (the absurdity struck me even then) a syringe! A syringe and a bottle of diluted acid. You smile at the idea now, as, even in the horror of the moment, I could smile at it then; and yet, as the event proved, the two together made a weapon not to be despised. The syringe, as I have said before, worked perfectly well, and only wanted the ring-handle fastening. It was a very powerful instrument, and would carry a strong, continuous douche of any fluid within it a continuous distance, spreading as it went further, just as shot spreads out of a gun. As for the acid, if once a man received any of that, or even the spray, in his eyes, he would certainly be blinded for some hours, if not for life—the latter a contingency which, in my desperate situation then, I did not for a moment consider.

I do not recollect how the idea, which you will now have seized, flashed across my mind; but I saw that if only I could get an opportunity of syringing Mr. Galt's eyes in a wholly non-professional way, I had a very good chance of escaping. The only difficulty was how to get the chance of applying my novel charge when the attack came; and, though it seems simple enough now, it cost me many minutes of agonizing thought before I could determine it on that night.

The storm had abated, and the moon was shining out, flooding the room—for the window had no blind—with a stream of silver. It behooved me, in the first place, then, to make up some semblance of myself, and place it in the bed, and, in the second, to conceal myself where, unseen, I could get near my assailant. I could not get behind the door, for it opened right on to the press; and, moreover, before my attack I was bound to be sure of my assailant's intention; for my host might come to visit me in a friendly

way only, and I must be cautious. You laugh, as I can now, at such casuistry; but it is a fact that I *did* go through that process of reasoning then, and acted upon it.

There was a little space between the press and the bed. In that I crouched down, having arranged the bolster and my coat under the clothes to resemble, as far as I could manage it, a sleeping man. Then I took out my syringe and tried it very gently in the bottle of acid, and, with a beating heart, and pulses which seemed to sound all over the room, waited the event.

My preparations had taken some time, and I was not kept long in suspense. Very shortly I heard a stealthy footfall on the stairs, which, step by step, approached my door, and then stopped. I forced myself (I don't know how, now) to breathe heavily and regularly, as if in sleep, and, after a few moments' hesitation, I felt, rather than heard, the door open. A slight jar against the press told me it was wide open, and that the spring was to come.

I had no idea, you see, of the nature of the attack. Would Galt fire on me? Would he spring upon the bed and smother me? Would he stab me or beat out my brains? The catalogue, you will admit, has a certain interest for you now; judge how it affected me then. I heard, or fancied I heard, a heavier and more decided step than any which had been taken before, and I knew that the moment had come.

I have seen performed most of the greatest operations of the day, here and on the Continent, and I have more than once witnessed a certain tremor and hesitation on the part of the surgeon just before the operation began. The moment the knife touched the flesh, his nerves were steel, and the work was done as if by machinery.

I do not talk boastingly when I say that, whereas when I listened to the footsteps and felt the door open, it was only by a superhuman effort I preserved myself from a dead faint; yet, when I knew a second or two would end the affair one way or the other, my hand was firm as a rock, and I held the syringe, charged, as coolly as I now hold this cigar, or as I should hold the knife at an operation.

Galt was breathing heavily; but for a moment I heard him catch his breath in, and then, with a low growl, like a wild beast rushing at its food, he sprang forward, and, with a short crowbar, dealt a fearful blow at the place where, but for God's mercy, my head would have been. Again and again he repeated his blows, not seeing, in the blind fury of murder, that they were falling harmless; and then, seemingly exhausted, he drew back, and, with wide-open, bloodshot eyes, gazed upon his handiwork.

Then was my chance. The murderer crouched over the bed, with the moonlight full on his face, hardly a foot from me. In another minute he would have discovered his mistake and seen me; but steadily I raised the syringe, and, exactly at the time when his gaze turned to me, I gave him a full ounce of the acid straight in his eyes.

I have no words to describe the fearful yell of astonishment, of fright, and of pain which he emitted. He would have faced either a blow, a stab, or a shot boldly enough, I dare say, though in any case he must have been terribly startled; but I had used a weapon unknown in his armory, and the effect was like that of a thunderbolt.

He gave a spasmodic leap into the air, the crowbar fell from his hands, and then he fell prone. Then, with a repetition of his awful yell, accompanied by a perfect hurricane of oaths and imprecations, he staggered to his feet, with the evident intention of finding his assailant.

But it was in vain. The strong irritant had done its work, and he could not open his blighted eyes for a second. He was, indeed, blind; and after a frantic rush against the press, in which he cut his forehead severely, he felt the door, and, staggering out, fell headlong down stairs. I heard the crash, and then all was still.

Simultaneously with his fall I must have fainted; and had Galt any accomplices, I must have fallen an easy victim to them. At last I roused myself, and, still hearing no sound, ventured down stairs, the way through the front room being the only means of egress. I imagined my antagonist had gone out, but, at any rate, I knew he must be blinded still; but, before I got down stairs, I could see him

lying flat on his face, his head buried in his arms. A bottle was thrown down beside him, and he was breathing stertorously. He had evidently taken refuge from his agony in the stupor of drunkenness.

I was passing lightly out, when it suddenly struck me that, except when I saw it in the moonlight, I had never obtained a good view of my antagonist's face. He had shaded it, as I said, coming in—it was terribly distorted when I saw it for that single moment—and I could not be certain of recognizing it; while it was hidden on his arms now. I had blinded him, you will say, but I could not judge of the effect of the acid, nor how long it would last. At all events I determined to mark my friend, who was quite insensible, so that for ten days or so I should be able to identify him. I took my little bottle of strong solution of nitrate of silver, and just under his handkerchief, at the back of his neck, I traced, with a camel's-hair pencil accompanying the solution, the figure of a cross. You know the action of the sun upon salts of silver; if his eyes recover quickly, I should still have something to identify my man by; for I did not know then whether it was Galt or some lodger who had made the attempt on my life. I was, however, to meet my assailant again sooner than I expected.

* * * * * * *

Immediately on reaching home, before I could see any one, I was called off to another case, which kept me till the evening of the next day. Arriving home then, I was told that Dr. Greenfield had gone to an inquest of a man who had met his death at John Galt's Inn. At John Galt's! As you may imagine, I hurried off, and was just in time to hear my late adversary tell the following ingenious story, which revealed to me, and to me alone, the fearful extent of his crimes.

The body of a man had been found in the Inn with his skull broken in by a crowbar. That John Galt admitted to have done, but said it was in self-defense, and that his assailant had thrown vitriol, or some such substance, into his eyes. In proof of which, there he was, nearly blind, with his eyes in a terrible state of inflammation.

That plausible story, which he had evidently concocted in desperation, trusting to the chapter of accidents not to bring his real antagonist forward, would have probably brought about his discharge; but I stepped forward, and requested to be examined, saying I could throw some light on the subject. There was a general murmur of astonishment, and even the doctor turned to me (remember I had seen no one) and asked what I could know about the affair.

However, it was impossible to overlook the offer of such evidence, and I was sworn. I then told, carefully and circumstantially, the story you have just heard, when, to my astonishment and disgust, I could see that it was looked upon with a good deal of suspicion. You see, I was quite a stranger in the place; and, if you look at the balance of probabilities, Galt's story was in some ways better than mine. His solicitor ridiculed my whole narrative, but said he could believe the strange use of the syringe, &c., if I had any evidence that I was ever in the place. I had come back, too, and gone off again, and he asked was I not wandering on the moor all the time. In fact, I saw he was making an impression; and it seemed also that the jury were unwilling to condemn a neighbor on such extraordinary evidence given by a stranger. If I could prove I was in the cottage—and Galt, who could hardly see, swore I had not been there—the story would have a very different complexion.

Suddenly the mark I had made upon the murderer flashed across me, and I brought it forward as proof. With considerable difficulty the coroner allowed Galt's neck to be bared; but amid loud murmurs, and to my horror no mark was to be found. Had it been removed? I felt certain it had not. It had only been covered up, and exposure to the sunlight would bring it out. I demanded that Galt's neck should be turned to the winter sun, then shining through the windows, explaining as well as I could how it was the mark had not appeared.

After much objection, this was done, and then, amid a scene of indescribable excitement, the sun gradually acted

upon the salts of silver, and by degrees the place blackened, till slowly and surely the mark came out; and there was the accusing cross, a silent witness to the truth of my story, and a sure condemnation of him who would fain have been a double murderer.

'It is a conjurer's trick,' cried the solicitor, angrily, while Galt stood stunned and puzzled, and the people leant eagerly forward to catch a glimpse of the mysterious mark.

'No,' said the coroner, 'it is no trick. That cross is the handwriting of Providence.'

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I may finish my story by telling you that before the cross faded from Mr. John Galt's neck, he was punctually hanged.

At the conclusion of the thrilling tale so ably recounted by the Doctor, it was proposed to toast St. Nicholas with a hearty bumper, and the idea was about to be carried into effect with acclamation, when a quiet voice came from a low stool near the fire, and the strange little gentleman who had accompanied the party asked to be allowed to add a closing link to the genial chain of stories they had been engaged in forging, and amidst the clinking of glasses as they passed around, he spoke thus:

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRANGER'S STORY—"AFTER MANY DAYS."

"THE whole town said, with scarcely a dissenting voice, that Andrew Walter's misfortunes, and this last misfortune in particular, were a judgment upon him. For, as the reader may have noticed, communities have usually much less difficulty in perceiving disasters to be judgments than they have in perceiving prosperity to be a just reward.

One might have been disposed to call the town a village

had it not from time immemorial returned a member to parliament. But in the pride of that distinction East Wykeham held itself far above villages.

We are not sure that the East Wykehamites are yet agreed as to which of *their own* sins it is that has called down the judgment which has fallen upon *them* in the loss of their member by the new Reform Bill. In fact the great majority of the pure and incorruptible consider that by the disfranchisement of their borough a gross injustice has been done them, and that they have sustained a definite and incalculable pecuniary loss for which they have an equitable claim for compensation from the State.

Should my listeners be disposed to ask further, what manner of place is EastWykeham? We are sorry we cannot say it is pretty well, or pretty lively, or pretty clean, or indeed pretty anything, unless we say it is pretty nearly the embodiment of dullness and stupidity. It is a place that has fallen out of the track of modern life and been passed by in the march of modern improvements. When other towns subscribed for railways, East Wykeham petitioned against them, stuck to its canal, and now beholds with envy the main line that passes at eight miles' distance, and with disgust its own slimy, weed-grown, deserted wharves. [East Wykeham is trying now to get up a branch line.] When that new-fangled, dangerous explosive, called gas, was discovered, East Wykeham stuck to oil and candles, by which alone to this night its streets are illuminated. [East Wykeham is negotiating now for a second-hand gasometer, retorts, &c., outgrown at the neighboring junction.] But it would have to be a very bad light indeed that would not be good enough to exhibit the contents of the High street windows, or the grass that grows down the middle of the High street itself.

The tradesmen, who are much given to standing at their doors and talking to each other, chuckle and rejoice over the extremely small sum it takes to keep their streets in good repair, and on the whole they don't object to grass.

As for society, there are the usual two doctors, two lawyers (one of whom was never known to have a client), the

vicar, two or three dissenting preachers, two grocers, two drapers, two tailors, and the rest; in all numbering a population, according to the last census, of we really cannot say precisely how few.

At any rate they have never been too few for the development among themselves of every known variety of evil speaking and uncharitableness; nor were they, as I began by saying, too many to agree in the case of Andrew Walter that his misfortunes were a judgment upon him, and that to sympathise with him would be little short of impious.

If he had not sown the wind, they argued, he would not have reaped the whirlwind. If he had brought up his boy better, as they, for example, had each of them brought up theirs (and as he, having only one boy, surely might have done), he would not then have been lamenting the lad's loss at sea.

It was an established axiom at East Wykeham that going to sea was about equivalent to going to penal servitude. And though a bench of magistrates may be found here and there to give a man three weeks' hard labor for picking up an apple, no one gets penal servitude if he has done absolutely nothing to deserve it. Andrew Walter, a man living on his own land, had sent his only son to sea, the excuse being that the boy had a liking for it, and had no taste for farming. But East Wykeham knew better than to set any value on such an excuse as this. A lad living in an inland county clearly had no right to have a taste for the sea. To have such a taste showed a natural depravity of character, which a judicious father would have subdued with the proper number of stripes. And as he had not subdued it, it was only in the nature of things that he should hear in due time that the ship, the "All is Well," had gone down with all hands, and should see himself left without the one who should have been the prop of his age, and the help of his motherless young daughters after he should have gone.

Neither were the townsfolk pitiful as regarded that matter of the bond. He had much better have never learned to

write at all than shown such fatal facility in writing his name. What matter that it *was* his own brother for whom he had become bound? Likely enough the brother *might* have paid his debts, and everybody had their due if he had had his health. But he had never known what health was for years,—a puny, sickly young man who never ought to have got married;—and as a matter of course he had died, deeply involved at his mill, and leaving wife and family quite unprovided for,—whom, people did say, Andrew Walter had maintained ever since his brother's death; which, if true, was clearly reckless extravagance. Could any one wonder, reckoning up the loss he had on his brother's death, the expense ever since of maintaining the family, the cost of his son's vessel, and of the valuable cargo with which he had freighted her, that all these things together had found the end of his resources? The latest report indeed was that he had just failed to effect a further mortgage on his property; that the present mortgagee, who had given notice to foreclose at the end of the present quarter, could not be pacified or paid, and that there must be a sale.

'And so,' concluded Mr. Botley, the grocer, to Mr. Skinner, the draper (each of whom had a bill of a few shillings against poor Andrew Walter)—'and so it is one makes bad debts, and loses one's money by other folks' fault, as doesn't care to work so hard for it.'

'Just so,' said Mr. Skinner.

'And no doubt we shall have our fine gentleman here in a few days,' remarked Mr. Botley again, 'to offer us a half a crown in the pound.'

'And,' said Skinner, 'if he comes I shall be sure to give him a piece of my mind; I shall be sure to do it.'

Andrew Walter's house pleasantly overlooked the town, both house and inmates being happily lifted above their neighbors' spite and unfriendliness. Though—not to be too hard upon the town—we will bear in mind that it is not always the people who say the unkindest words who do the unkindest deeds, and will hope that East Wykeham, too, should Andrew Walter ever have to ask it for bread, will at least not give him a stone.

If, as the winter day closed in, any of you could have walked up the well-kept gravelled path, defended by choice shrubs, and could have stood at the bright window, whose panes flashed beneath the firelight, this is what you would have seen inside as snug a room as you could wish to look upon.

First, a man somewhat past the middle age, well knit, and sinewy, with a face kindly and pleasant, though not without lines of care, and at present full of perplexity. He sits with his elbow on his knee, and his chin upon his hand, looking steadily into the fire, in which he does not seem to read any clear answer to the question he is asking. This is Andrew Walter.

Next, a girl of about eighteen, but looking older and as if a premature responsibility had sobered her merry face. She sits at a table which is covered with evergreens, and is busy stitching ivy leaves on strips of cardboard which in a little while will be shaped into letters. This is Maggie, Andrew's eldest daughter.

Next, another girl, some four years younger, wonderfully like her sister, but more like her father. She, too, is busy constructing, with wire and string to help, a long rope or ropes of leafy green. This is Edith, the second daughter.

Lastly, the Mite; as Andrew often calls her sadly, 'the widower's mite.' She is a wee maiden of only six years old, but persuades herself she, too, is usefully busy, with needle and thread, making a necklace of the scarlet holly-berries. Her name is Lucy.

The girls, it is to be noticed, are all in black, seemingly of the newest and deepest; and there appears to be but little speaking amongst them.

One could not look upon the man without feeling that he was a man of strong passions and affections; nor on the girls without feeling they were all in all to each other and to him.

Until within the last year the current of his life had flowed smoothly and prosperously. He had but one great sorrow—the loss of his wife; and that sorrow hav-

ing befallen him when his little maid was born, had been softened by time, though not (and not to be) forgotten. Now, however, he was indeed in troubled waters. That town's talk about money matters and an impracticable mortgage was in the main correct. He had, in one way or other, lost nearly all he had. And at his time of life it was hard to have to devise plans of keeping the wolf from the door. All kinds of pecuniary loss, loss of position, loss of comforts and luxuries, were, nevertheless, but deprivations of things he might hope to win back again; or, failing that, he could face the want of them with manly fortitude and resignation.

The one loss to which he could not bring himself to be submissive (being loss of that which no strength of arm or activity of brain could ever bring him back again), was the loss of his boy. 'The sea, indeed, shall give up its dead,' he said to himself, 'but not to me.'

He took from his pocket-book and read once more the account, cut out from a Calcutta newspaper, of the great catastrophe in the Hoogly which had bereaved him. It gave, as far as was known, the names of all vessels lost, with the port to which they belonged, the captain's name, and a brief description of the nature of the damage in each case. The entry in which he was interested read thus:

Name of Ship.	Of what Port.	Name of Owner.	Name of Captain.	Remarks.
All is Well.	Not known.	Not known.	Supposed J. E. Walter.	Crew and cargo all lost.

Now his son James had sailed from England not for Calcutta but Hong Kong, and it was clear he must have encountered such terrible weather as had first driven him far out of his course, and, at the last, compelled him to run for the Hoogly, just at the time when that river was a vortex of destruction to every craft that entered it.

In addition to the particulars got from the newspapers, he had obtained, through the consular agency, this further information: The evidence on which the name of the captain had been published as 'supposed J. E. Walter'

was that, entangled amongst the wreck of the 'All is Well' had been found a portion of a captain's coat, in the breast-pocket of which had been found several papers, all of which were quite illegible except one empty envelope, the address of which had been deciphered as 'Captain J. E. Walter, the "All is Well," Cape Town.' The English post-marks were 'East Wykeham,' and 'London,' date illegible. This envelope Andrew Walter had procured to be forwarded to him, and had found the hand-writing upon it to be his own. After seeing which he had given up all the faint hope to which he had clung, and had treasured this old envelope as the last link of communication which he knew to have passed between him and his son.

Restoring the piece of newspaper and the envelope to his pocket-book, he lit a candle, left the girls at their work, and went into an adjoining room. Leaning against the wall was a package wrapped in matting, small, but somewhat heavy. The contents, when unwrapped and placed upon the table, proved to be a plain, white marble slab, bearing this inscription:

'In remembrance of

JAMES EDWARD WALTER,

only son of Andrew Walter, of this place), who was drowned in the River Hoogly, Bengal, during the great hurricane of 185–. Aged 22 years.

Rev. xxi. 1.'

He had chosen to append this reference to a text of scripture, rather than the text itself. Those who cared to turn up the passage in their Bibles, as they sat in church, would see that the comfort he found in it was in keeping before him the thought that though hereafter there should be a new heaven, and a new earth, there should be 'no more sea.'

The father called the girls in for a minute to look at the slab, and they read the inscription silently and tearfully. Then he covered it up again, and they went back.

The stone had been worked elsewhere and sent home to him that he might himself (as he had wished) superintend its erection over his own pew. Thus he and his daughters

had each a duty in church to-morrow; his, to go early with the mason and put up this stone; theirs, to go later and help the vicar's wife to affix the Christmas decorations; for the morrow was the Eve of Christmas Day. And, moreover, there was one little chaplet of cypress and yew which Maggie and Edith had prepared to hang upon their brother's monument.

'I remember,' said Andrew, 'teaching him all about India, and the Ganges, and this very Hoogly itself, years and years ago; little thinking—ah! little thinking.'

The girls only shook their heads gently and sighed.

'And I doubt and fear it was my teaching him so much geography that filled him full of longing to see the world, and the ways of strange people, and first made him impatient of this dull place.'

'Impatient of it, but never of us, papa. Let us be thankful for that,' said Maggie.

'Tired of us? No, indeed,' said the father, with proud affection. 'I have known some sad days, and I doubt there are more in store for all of us; but the saddest day of all would be that on which I should first think my children were tired of their father or each other.'

A little hand had stolen into his as he spoke and a little mouth had been upturned to kiss him, while two other faces had turned to him with looks more eloquent than words.

He took the young child upon his knee and wound her curls about his rough, strong fingers, as he spoke again. 'And I won't say that he was wrong to choose the sea. Could any lad have done better at it than he has done? Would not his masters have made him captain at twenty-one of their own vessel if I had not bought him a ship myself, and freighted it?'

'And he never once,' said Edith, 'spent a holiday anywhere but here.'

'I wonder if it was the name that did it,' pondered Andrew, who was not without his superstitions. 'I wonder if I tempted Providence when I would call the ship no other name than "All is Well."'

'The ships that went down in the storm that day had names of all kinds,' said Maggie, 'and one name had as little protection in it as another.'

There, as the outer darkness deepened, they sat by the fire and talked. The little one on Andrew's knee.

It seemed a transition almost from night to day when they passed from talk of the lost boy to talk of the mere loss of money, so much had the greater trouble exceeded the less. But it was not till Maggie had peeped over her father's arm into the small face and said 'she's asleep,' that they spoke quite freely of their pecuniary difficulties. The father had taken his elder girls wholly into his confidence, knowing that he could trust them. And they, seeing themselves so trusted, were cheerfully making the least of all difficulties.

The solicitor through whom all Andrew's money transactions had hitherto been arranged, was an old schoolfellow of his, whose probity and kindness of heart he had long known. His position was rather that of an intimate and affectionate family friend than a legal adviser. But the letters of this friend, which had of late been many, had, in spite of all his wishes to serve, come to be looked on almost with dread. Their appearance and their prim little seal were well known by all the family. Even little Lucy knew so well that these letters were different from other letters, that she had a way of propping them up and lecturing them seriously before they were opened, and sometimes even went the length of whipping them very severely, with a view to impressing upon them that they really must be good and try to please papa when he opened them—a mode of treatment which had as yet produced, to her regret, no salutary effect.

Andrew had written to this friend a few days before making some final suggestions towards the renewal of the mortgage; and though he had but the faintest hope of the reply being such as he could wish, his heart sickened that he had got no reply at all.

'To-morrow there will surely be a letter,' he said; and if there is I shall quite dread to read it.'

For indeed it depended on this letter whether they should stay in their old home, or go out at once into the world and seek another.

'But now, Maggie,' he said, 'as this may be the last Christmas we shall have here, we must not keep it quite like a common day, even though we cannot keep it as we used to do. Put on your bonnet and go into the town with me. Poor little Mite, how soundly she sleeps; see, she has not waked by my putting her on Edie's knee.

As the door closed gently on them, however, up sprang little Loo and drew aside the curtain, peeping after them, and laughing.

'I've never been asleep a minute, Edie, she said, 'only pretending.'

Whereupon Edie, having first assumed what she supposed would be the appropriate manner of a lady of about fourscore, talked down to the young deceiver from that great elevation, in an impressive way, and having wrung for Martha, inexorably told that maid to take her off to bed.

Then she herself set to work again with busy fingers amongst her holly leaves, her ivory and laurel, until she had got length enough, as she thought, of bright green rope. After which she gave the finishing touches to Maggie's letters, and fixing a white table cover against the piano, pinned them on it,—the sacred monogram

IHS

to try their effect against the clean white linen of the communion table. Last of all, making haste, she swept away her greenery and had a cheerful, homely supper on the table when fatther and Maggie came in with the heavy night-rime hanging on them.

They had made the little purchases for the Christmas Day, buying on a humbler scale than usual, and, as Maggie told her, had sent to the widow's house at the mill exactly the same as they had bought for themselves, for Andrew's dainties would have had no relish had he thought those who were so near to him, and had been so dear to his dead brother, did not share in them.

Next morning Lucy was up early, and the season in distinction to the present being one of those mild and open ones which have of late taken the place of the severe Christmases of our fathers, she ran out and amused herself, as children like to do, by digging.

The place she chose for digging was just inside the garden gate, where she was accustomed to wait on fine mornings to get the letters from the postman.

The garden gate was not quite visible from any of the windows of the house, the path being curved; but Edie, running out betimes (for they were all early risers), found the child busy there. She had excavated a very neat little grave, and was just giving the finishing touches to her work.

'Who are you going to bury to-day, Loo?' she asked.

'Oh, I know,' said the child; 'you go along. It's not you; it's a wickeder thing than you."

'I see the postman coming round the corner,' said Edie; 'run in as soon as you get the letters;' and so she left her.

In another minute the child had the letters from the postman,—some four or five; and in an instant (as soon as his back was turned), had selected the wicked one (the London letter with the prim little seal, which she had so often whipped in vain), had pitched it into the little grave, deftly filled in the earth, and made all smooth above it, then ran into the house with the rest of the letters, out of breath.

'Nothing again,' said Andrew, as he turned them over. 'But I doubt no news is not good news this time. Franklin would have written, I am sure, if he had had anything to write which would do us good. Sure you have not dropped any letters, Loo?' But when he looked round he found the child had slipped out of the room, and nothing more was said when she returned. Neither he nor the girls indeed made any mention of the letter which had been expected, or of the subject to which it should have referred; but that subject weighed not the less heavily on all of them.

To each of them it was clear now that in this matter of the mortgage nothing could be done, that the money must be paid, and that to pay it there must be a sale, and they must leave the dear old house. As they passed from room

to room that morning, or from walk to walk in the garden, a feeling grew upon them all that they were taking farewell looks of all. And as the girls decorated the pictures and mirrors with the Christmas holly, they thought sadly that when Christmas came again other hands would cut the shrubs and trim the rooms for other people.

Happily those duties which lay nearest to each of them were sufficient in great measure to distract their minds from dwelling too much upon the future. Let come what would to-morrow, to-day had its own work waiting for each of them.

While the girls were busied therefore about their household morning work, doubly diligent that they might hurry to the church, Andrew Walter went with the mason and saw the memorial he had provided for his son erected over his own pew.

This did not occupy him long, and he was soon at home again, walking briskly in his fields, perhaps hoping to find in weariness of limb some rest for over anxiety of spirit.

As for the fine old church, when the bright sunlight poured in through the many-colored window panes, and fell on the sweet patient faces of these girls as they wreathed the pulpit, the communion rails, and the grand columns of the nave—as they decked the holy table itself with living green and scarlet, and expended all their loving ingenuity and taste in the decoration of the quaint old rood screen, it was by no means a place of gloom. Even the timed-stained monuments upon the walls—the ancient knight and lady still uplifting stony hands in silent prayer—the grotesque faces of the corbels all seemed to wear a brighter, tenderer aspect under the influence of the Christmas green. The old dead stone and the young animated faces seemed alike touched with a new and deeper expression under the influence of the gracious season and the work that in itself was surely a sort of worship.

As column after column was finished and arch after arch showed its rich free outline in bright green; as one after the other the branching candelabra grew into graceful bushes of leaves and fruit; the sun sank down and the

shadows crept out. Then when all was finished and the old sexton, with one solitary candle, was sweeping up the scattered fragments from the floor, the vicar's wife, and the rest of those who had been at work, shook hands and parted.

When all the rest had gone, however, Maggie and her sisters stayed behind. And with them stayed their cousin Minnie from the mill, a girl of about Maggie's own age, who mourned for the lost sailor lad with a bitterness that was intensified by thinking that she had let him go when last they parted with her love still unconfessed.

The girls sat for a while all silent in the family pew. Maggie held little Lucy in her arms and Edith rested with her head on Minnie's knee. The moon rose and poured its light with a glory of crimson and gold full on them and on the new marble slab, beneath which Maggie sat with her face buried on the young child's shoulder.

It was Minnie who was organist at the church, and being there she must needs play over one of the anthems of the morrow. Edith went with her to blow the bellows. For a while Maggie continued to sit with bowed head, still weeping, but soothed and calmed by the strains.

The hymn was 'Hark the herald angels sing;' and as the player forgot her sorrow more and more in the exhultation of the music,—as the notes swelled more and more jubilant, filling the grand old church with melody, the little voice of Lucy rose in Maggie's ear singing the well-known words, and Maggie herself unconsciously joined in them and lifted up her head.

There in front of her, clearly defined by the moon, stood her brother—the dead brother who had been lost at sea. Maggie neither screamed nor fainted. He had been so entirely present in her mind—she had as yet been so wholly unable to think of him as anything but the bright, cheerful brother of all her life, that to see him there seemed at first only natural. Then in a moment, however, the recollection of all that had befallen in the last mournful months flashed up. No fear came with the recollection; only an intense surprise. Why *should* she fear, if even this were the spirit of

her much-loved brother? She clasped her little child (whose face was turned away) more closely to her, and leaning forward in the pew, she shaded her eyes from the moon and looked steadily and earnestly into the face.

The hands and arms of the figure came forward, stretching towards her in the pew. A voice came from the figure: 'Maggie, it is I;' and in an instant another voice—the voice of Lucy—screamed, 'Oh, Maggie! that is Jamie! my own brother Jamie!' and the child sprang from Maggie's knee, and was in his arms.

"And why should I have thought anything too hard for God? Why should I not have had faith that he who raised Lazarus would raise my brother too? Neither Martha nor Mary sorrowed more for their brother than I for mine.'

The *words* did not shape themselves; but this, in all its fullness, was the thought that in a moment of time had passed through Maggie's mind. Then she also was in her brother's arms. For indeed it was he and none another, alive and well.

Meanwhile, the music had ceased, less because the player had been interrupted by any noise, than by reason of that subtle instinct which so often tells, we know not how, that something wonderful and strange, in which we have an interest and a share, is happening near at hand.

One moment more and Edith and Minnie also were clinging to him, sobbing for joy, and the secret of Minnie's heart was a secret from him no longer.

They all set down for awhile and looked at each other with an exultation strangely mingled with doubt. Joy was so much stronger than curiosity, that none of them thought of asking any questions. It was enough that he was restored to them: it mattered not how.

At last he pointed to the new marble above the pew, and said, with a shaking voice—

'Oh! what grief it has been to you. We must have that down to-night.'

'It went up only this morning,' said Maggie.

'Then you *have not* got the letter this morning,' he

asked, 'which was sent to tell you of my coming, and all about it? Indeed I am sure you have not.'

'No,' said Maggie.

'It was enclosed from London by Mr. Franklin.'

'In a blue envelope with a little red seal,' said Lucy; 'and I buried it in the garden, because those letters have always been naughty, and vexed papa.'

In spite of all, what could they do but laugh at the child's explanation? even were it only to make her lift up her head again and be less ashamed of her guilt.

'The letter was to tell you how this sad, sad mistake has arisen, and to say that Mr. Franklin and I were coming down to spend, as we shall find it, the happiest Christmas we have ever known. You were to send and meet us at the Junction, and we were to have been with you two hours ago, if we had not had to walk.'

'And have you seen father?' the girls asked.

'No; he was not in the house. So I have left his old friend there, while I sought you and him. The organ was playing as I came to the church-door, and that told me where to find you. But let us make haste home to him.'

Andrew Walter was at home when they arrived, and had heard from the old lawyer the story of his son's return; but had as yet not succeeded in convincing himself that the great joy was real. Not, indeed, until he had the young man in his arms did he fully believe it or dare to say, awe-stricken—

'The sea has indeed given up its dead—given up its dead even to me.'

We will not dwell upon that meeting of father and son, neither of whom had ever known what it was to doubt or mistrust, or waver in his effection for the other. There are some moments of bliss so unalloyed, so great and so beyond the force of mere language, that only the human heart (which responds alike in high and low, when the great master hand of Nature sweeps the chords), can perceive their perfectness.

To give the necessary facts as briefly as possible, this was how the circumstantial evidence by which the young cap-

tain had been declared to be dead, and his ship lost, was shown to be worthless.

Innocent of plagiarism as Andrew Walter had thought himself in choosing for his vessel the name 'All is Well,' there was really another ship afloat, sailing from a German port, but owned by an English master, which bore the same name. When James Walter sailed into the harbor of Cape Town, he was amazed to read the name of his own craft as having arrived a week earlier from the Baltic. And having found out that this namesake of his vessel was still in port, he was not long before he sought her out, and made acquaintance with her captain. The two vessels sailed afterwards from Cape Town on the same day, Captain Jacobson bound for Calcutta, he himself for Hong Kong. Before parting they had got to like each other, and promised that on getting into port they would write and let each other know what sort of voyage they had. Walter distinctly remembered writing his own address in pencil inside an envelope which had contained his father's letter received at Cape Town, and giving this to Jacobson. The next he heard of his poor friend was that his vessel and he were lost in the Hoogly. This he learnt from an Indian newspaper somewhere in China, and saw that the captain was supposed to be himself, though how they had got his name he had never known till now. He had instantly written home to allay the fears of his family; but by a strange fatality the mail steamer which bore his letter proved to be that very one which struck in the Red Sea, and whose bags were lost. Contrary winds had made his voyage home a long one, and he had arrived in London only the day before. Then when he called on their old friend, Mr. Franklin, he had, to his utter sorrow, learnt that he was still counted amongst the dead, and that these other troubles had fallen on them besides. Mr. Franklin had advised him not to come home that first night, but to write first, enclosing the letter under his own envelope, the hand-writing on which would help to save them from the shock of so sudden a joy. And this was the letter which Miss Lucy had so dexterously buried, and which, by the aid of a lantern and that young lady to point out the grave, they now exhumed.

'Mine,' said Mr. Franklin, 'you need not read; for, as I said, it is only to tell you that the mortgage business is all settled in a way beyond all our hopes. The old sinner, as soon as he knew that the money was ready for him, of course turned around and was particularly anxious not to have it.

'But as he has given notice,' exclaimed Jamie, 'he shall have it, whether he wants it or not. And, let me have one more voyage like this, then we will offer to lend *him* a little money ourselves, on equally as good security as he has had.'

For Jamie had disposed of his cargo in the China seas to unhoped for advantage, and had come back freighted, he hoped, with wares which he could at once dispose of as profitably in England.

Compared with this resurrection of the dead, and this recovery of lost wealth, other pleasures and surprises of that night were trivial.

But, nevertheless, when the huge load of luggage arrived which had been brought in a cart from the Junction, the unpacking of the boxes was a sight worth seeing.

Jamie had forgotten nobody. Not to mention the quaint monsters in bronze and ivory, and the pictures from Japan and China, which were for no one in particular, there were the beautiful inlaid and carved workboxes for each of the girls (both at home and at the mill), there was the set of wonderfully-carved chess-men, and the extraordinary pipe for father; there was a cage of brilliant birds, and a dog so small you might have almost called it microscopic, for the Mite; there were endless shawls and silks to adorn the girls, and drive the townsfolk wild with envy,—in short, there were so many things rich and rare that the house before half of them were unpacked wore the look of an oriental bazaar.

'Was it,' he almost asked himself, 'was it the solid ground he trod upon, or was it the air?' as he ran with Minnie to her home, having wrapped her well in some of this new finery and loaded her and himself with presents for the poor widow and the children at the mill.

He could not stay there, nor anywhere. He hardly gave them all time to kiss him before he was off again, declaring he had fifty things to do that night and could not spare a minute apiece for doing them in. But he did not leave before he had made them all understand they had to go to dinner at his father's on the morrow.

Then to the church, first finding Mr. Stonemason, who took down the lying monument, as he declared, with much greater pleasure than he had put it up. When down, the vicar, who had heard the news (as indeed all the town had), begged the stone to keep as a curiosity, and almost dislocated Jamie's arm by way of expressing his own gladness.

The ringers were gathering at the church as they came out, for in half an hour they would begin the peals of Christmas Eve.

Said the vicar—'Now, my men, cannot you give us one special peal, first, for the lost who is found, and the dead who is alive again?'

Said the sexton, who was also chief ringer,—'We are two men short.'

Said Mr. Botley, the grocer, and Mr. Skinner, the draper, who were standing by—'We'll take a rope apiece;' for they were amateur bell-ringers, and could pull with a will, and had forgotten all their fears of half a crown in the pound from Andrew Walter.

Whereupon he for whom the peal was meant, like the coward he was not, took to his heels and ran home, seeing reason to fear that if he did not do so he might be carried shoulder-high.

The clear voices of the bells overtook him nevertheless before he was half-way home, and made him turn to look back upon the darkling town, blessing it and them. For never since the bells were cast had they sent forth a heartier peal than that they flung upon the air that night; Botley and Skinner having doffed their coats and warmed to their work with mutual emulation.

* * * * * * *

Mr. Franklin did not make it quite clear to Lucy either

that night or next day what had made him be so wicked as to write those vexatious letters to papa. But after dinner next day—that is Christmas Day—when that young lady had almost danced him off his legs—although, for an old gentleman, he did dance quite wonderfully—she so far repented of her past severity towards him as to promise that if he would write often she would neither whip him in person nor whip his proxy, and that under no circumstances would she ever again bury another of his letters, prematurely.

CHAPTER IX.

EPILOGUE—CHRISTMAS-EVE.

The speaker ceased, and as the last echo of his voice died away upon the ears of his listeners, and released them from the spell-bound attention, with which they had regarded him, the grey light of the winter dawn was seen to be making its way through the narrow windows. It was "Christmas morning," and as each grasped the other by the hand, there was a constant interchange of the oft-repeated wish. "A merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." Words cost nothing, and may often be used unthinkingly, but I fancy you will concur with me, dear Reader, in the belief that if sincerity clings to any well known, and it may be somewhat hackneyed expression, it is to this old-fashioned formula. All the surroundings of Christmas breathe of peace and good will, and from the time,

> "When shepherds watched their flocks by night,
> All seated on the ground,"

as the good old Carol has it—down to these latter, and in many respects more favored days the season has never resigned its charm, and to a vast proportion of the Sons of Men, this Christmas of 1877, [rising although it may, on scenes of strife and bloodshed, in many parts of God's earth,] will bring only a sweet halo of peace and forgiving

love. The song of the angels is as fresh as ever, and will be chanted by thousands of lips with truthful earnest unction—Tiny Tims, prayer of "God bless us, everyone," in Dickens incomparable story, was only a child's utterance, but it carries with it a lesson all may learn, and some even aspire to in vain.

But we must not forget that we have left our friends still ensconsed in the old light-house where a brief interval of repose followed the period of pleasant social intercourse they had enjoyed.

A clear, sunshiny morning succeeded the night of wind and tempest, but having a very natural objection to continue their journey on Christmas-Day the travellers determined to accept the suggestion of the good doctor, who proposed they should all adjourn to the Red Lion for breakfast and afterwards drive over to Porthenna and join his own home circle for the remainder of the day.

The bells of the church were ringing forth a merry old Christmas peal, as after wishing Forbes a hearty adieu they retraced their steps into Holyhead, where they made a capital breakfast, after which a drive of eight miles brought them to the Doctor's hospitable abode. Here a most kindly welcome was accorded them by the ladies of the family, which consisted of the Doctor's wife and three daughters. Of the festivities that ensued I need say nothing, suffice it to remark that our friend Basil fell no unwilling victim to the witcheries of Mabel Cuming, the youngest of the sisterly trio, whilst Stanton Bell persuaded the eldest to promise to take a journey across the Atlantic to his quiet New Hampshire home at no remote date. The remainder of the party being already Benedicts, could only watch with interest the movements of their bachelor comrades. This, however, did not lessen their own measure of enjoyment of the scene, and when the evening came to an end and they all separated, it was with hearty expressions of mutual good-will and esteem; nor did they in after years cease frequently to recall their pleasant experiences of "Christmas-Eve in a Light-house."

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

THEY are ringing, they are ringing,
  Our merry Christmas bells,
In the village, in the city,
  In the dale-church, o'er the fells.

Be our ways of life so varied,
  Be our fortunes poor or bright,
Hand in hand with all our brothers,
  We are one *at least* to-night.

Nor the rich man in his mansion,
  Nor the sovereign on the throne,
Nor the beggar in his hovel
  Will enjoy themselves *alone.*

We all seek the kindly greeting
  Of some dear, familiar face;
We all know that hermit feeling
  For to-night is out of place.

But *one* night. Why not for ever
  Should we bind the golden chain
That shows man his poorest fellow
  Was not sent to earth in vain?

That each sorrow hath a purpose,
  That each gift hath an alloy,
That ever finely balanced
  Are the scales of grief and joy.

Spare a little, then, ye rich ones,
  From your laden coffers now;
Bring to poverty a sun-ray,
  Bring a smile to sorrow's brow.

Take it gratefully, ye toilers,
  Toilers up earth's weary hill;
'Tis a green spot in your desert,
  'Tis a good sprung from your ill.

Yes! be rich and poor united,
  'Tis most grand in Heaven's sight,
And a blessing, not *earth's* blessing,
  Is on all the world to night!

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